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THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

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30 YEARS OF **ZX SPECTRUM**

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SUPER MARIO RPG
HOW NINTENDO AND SQUARE CREATED THIS HIT RPG HYBRID

WIPEOUT
BEHIND THE SCENES OF SONY'S FUTURISTIC RACER

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IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

VIRTUAL BOY
WE PLAY EVERY GAME AVAILABLE ON NINTENDO'S HARDWARE FLOP

KID ICARUS
WHY PIT'S FIRST ADVENTURE IS STILL GREAT

SALAMANDER SOFTWARE
THE SOFTWARE HOUSE THAT HELPED PIONEER GAMING FOR THE ORIC-1, DRAGON 32 AND BBC MICRO

CYBERNOID
RAFFAELE CECCO DISCUSSES HIS 8-BIT SHOOT-'EM-UP



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THE RETROBATES BEST SPECTRUM DEVELOPER



DARRAN JONES
I'm going to say Mervyn J Estcourt, mainly because *Deathchase* remains one of the most exciting videogames I've ever played.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Unit 13
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT
Ultimate Play The Game for me. Predictable, I know, but I was in awe of games like *Jetpac* and *Sabre Wulf*.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Syndicate (online)
Favourite game of all time:
Syndicate (online)



PAUL DAVIES
I really hate to be boring, but it could only be Ultimate Play The Game.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall.
Currently playing:
Halo: Reach
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



JASON KELK
Jonathan Cauldwell has done more well-designed, bizarre and playable games than I can even remember right now.
Expertise:
Homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Joust (Amiga)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



PAUL DRURY
The sensible answer is Ultimate, but for giving the world snapping toilets and waltzing Swiss Army knives, I'll say Matthew Smith.
Expertise:
Evading armed gorillas
Currently playing:
Inazuma Eleven 2
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



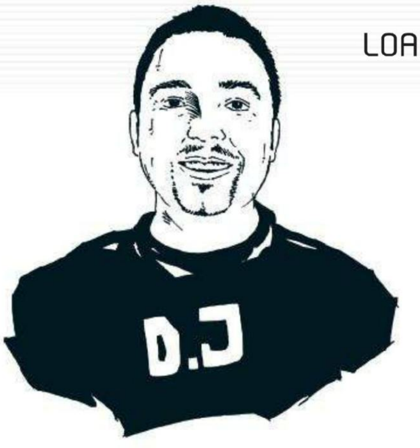
DAVID CROOKES
It's got to be Matthew Smith. An utter genius with an offbeat sense of humour. Nothing can beat the splendour of *Manic Miner*.
Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Uncharted: Golden Abyss
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



ASHLEY DAY
It has to be Matthew Smith. *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* epitomise everything that made the Spectrum unique, and there's really been nothing else like them since.
Expertise:
The games of Team17, MSX, Sega's *Shining Force* series
Currently playing:
Sine Mora
Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III



RICHARD BURTON
Matthew Smith aside, I admired Odin Computer Graphics. Be it *Nodes Of Yesod*, *Heartland* or *Robin Of The Wood*, it brazenly copied Ultimate's style but yet frequently outdid it.
Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Robin Of The Wood
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



LOADING...

If there's one thing I love about Retro Gamer, it's the thought of discovering the unknown. Many readers love the fact that Retro Gamer acts as a comfortable nostalgia blanket, giving them a warm monthly dose of the games they used to enjoy when they were young. As much as I enjoy this aspect of the magazine, it's the discovery of new developers that we can feature that constantly pushes me forward.

Retro Gamer is always at its best when it's revealing new content about a developer or a classic series, and this month is no different, with a detailed look at arguably the best games to ever bear the *Star Wars* name. We've plenty more lined up for future issues, and while some of the people we're planning to interview aren't as well known as the likes of Matthew Smith, Shigeru Miyamoto, Andrew Braybrook or Peter Molyneux, they all have interesting stories to tell.

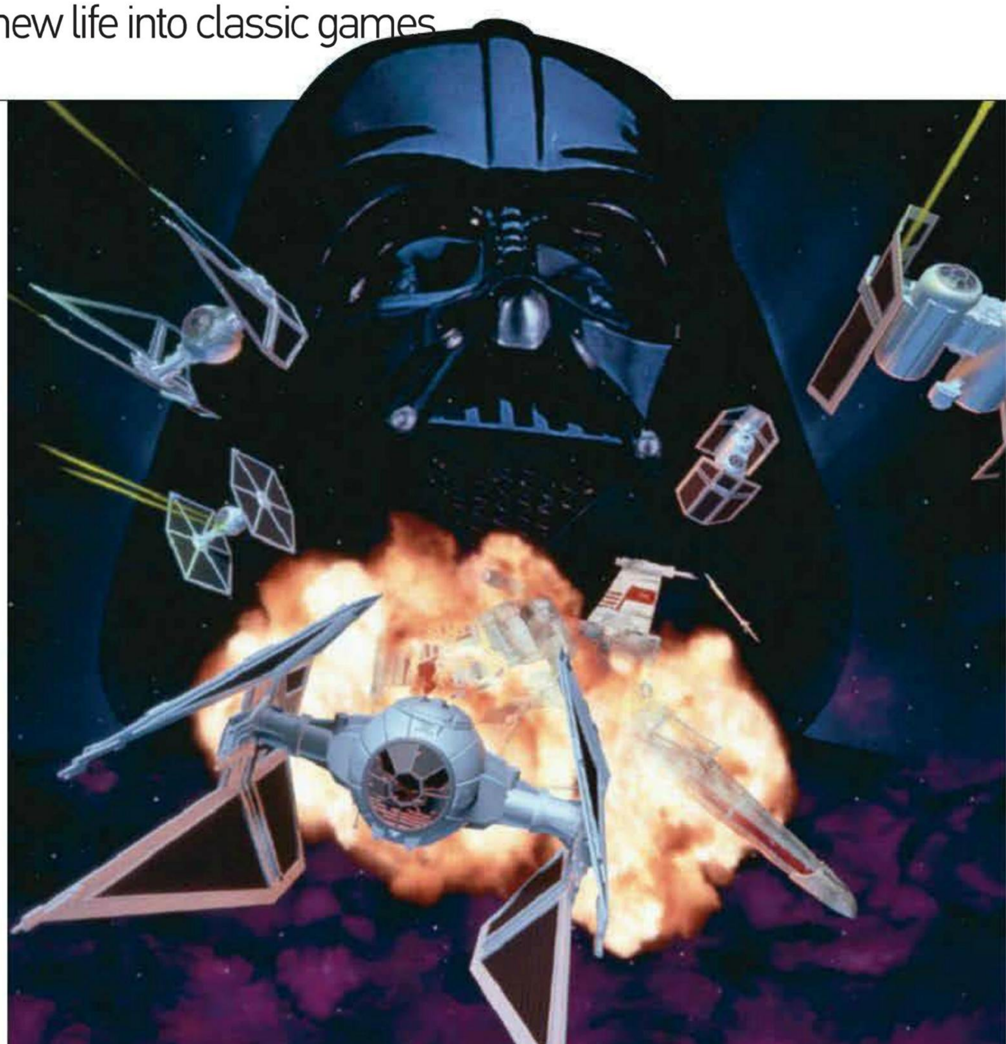
And the brilliant thing is that there are still dozens upon dozens of people who I still want to feature. My personal list alone includes Mervyn Estcourt, Carol Shaw, Paul Woakes, Paul Shirley, Mark Betteridge and Remi Herbulot, and that's without even considering numerous Japanese developers. Clearly I still have plenty of work to do…



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>> Load 102 Breathing new life into classic games

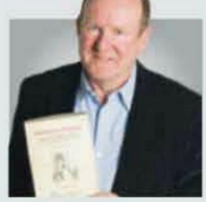
FEATURED



RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…





ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED



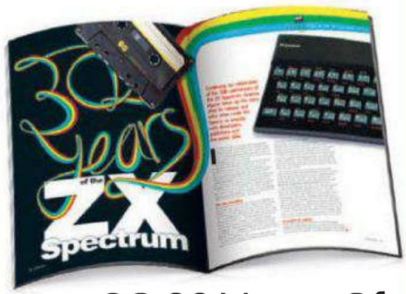


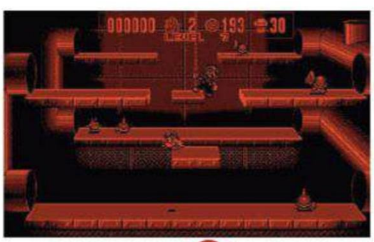
"An intelligent twist on the FPS formula"

Samuel Roberts









retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL







retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> Lots of interesting nuggets of information this month. Atari remakes Pong in honour of its upcoming anniversary, Shenmue and Baldur's Gate are set to return, and an SNK fan recalls one of the biggest finds of the Neo Geo community

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BACK TO BASICS

ATARI CELEBRATES PONG'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY WITH A REMAKE



» Atari released a promotional video for the *Pong* Indie Challenge featuring Atari Inc co-founder Nolan Bushnell.

Atari Inc's *Pong* is one of the world's most important and iconic videogames, instantly recognisable the world over.

To celebrate its imminent anniversary, the current Atari has recently put forward an interesting competition. It has lain down a challenge to developers to create a new variant of the classic arcade game for the iOS generation. The winner of the *Pong* Indie Developer Challenge competition will not only receive up to $50,000, but also get a full revenue-share publishing agreement that will provide marketing and additional PR support.

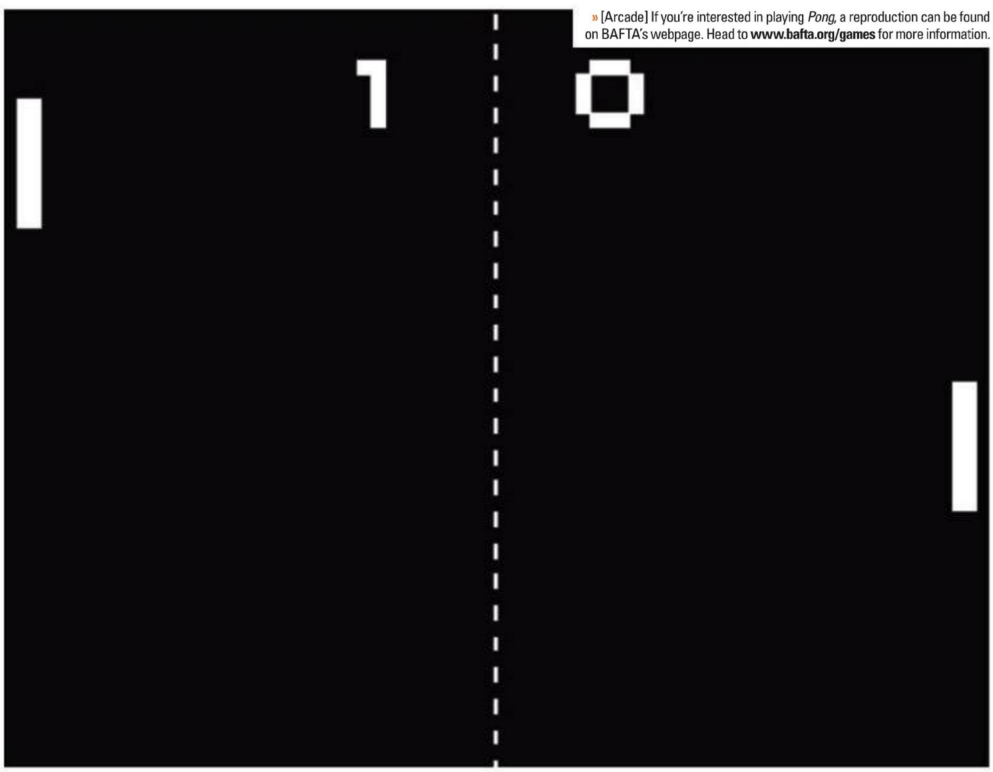
Interested to find out more about the intriguing project, we spoke to Maria Pacheco, Atari's VP of mobile games, to find out how the competition was set up and why it was initiated in the first place.

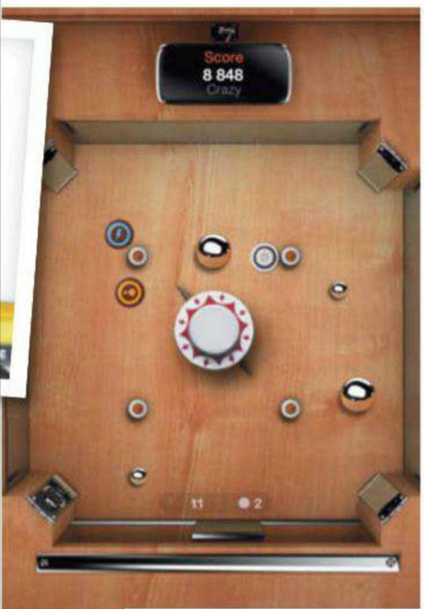
Retro Gamer: Where did the idea for the *Pong* Challenge come from?

Maria Pacheco: This year marks the 40th anniversary of Atari and the *Pong* franchise. At a time when gaming has become hugely popular among mainstream audiences, perhaps even on track to become the pre-eminent form of entertainment in the world, we wanted to celebrate the developers, those responsible for building the great games that have entertained us over the years. Ultimately, we decided a fun way to do this would be to give the indie developer community an opportunity to actually develop and release a game under the brand that started it all, and a platform to gain long-term recognition for their work.

RG: Why did you decide to choose *Pong* over your other retro games?

» [Arcade] If you're interested in playing *Pong*, a reproduction can be found on BAFTA's webpage. Head to **www.bafta.org/games** for more information.





» [iOS] This amazing multiplayer *Pong* variant recently had its name changed from *Multipong* to *Multiponk*.

“We’re tapping into the spirit of the garage developers of the first widely released game”

MP: *Pong* is arguably the world’s most recognised title and the game that started the videogame revolution. In reaching out to independent developers through this challenge, we’re tapping into the creative spirit of the original ‘garage developers’ that created the world’s first widely released videogame, giving participants the chance to make their mark on gaming in much the same way as Nolan Bushnell and the original programmers did 40 years ago.

RG: Why have you decided to launch the challenge on iOS?
MP: The Apple App Store is an incredibly successful platform that has expanded gaming to mainstream audiences, many of whom grew up playing *Pong* and countless Atari classics. Our recent App Store releases are indicative of the success that can be realised through the platform: *Atari’s Greatest Hits*, *Asteroids: Gunner* and *Breakout: Boost* have been collectively downloaded over 7 million times.

However, it’s becoming increasingly difficult for the smaller developers to be discovered, especially as larger and more established publishers enter the space with quality games and large marketing budgets. Hosting this challenge on iOS is a way to bring the work of indie developers to the attention of both Atari fans and a huge market of mobile gamers that is only getting larger.

RG: How much input will Nolan Bushnell have on the final decision?
MP: Nolan is an official member of the judging panel, alongside several iOS gaming experts, including Mike Schramm of The Unofficial Apple Weblog; Dave Castlenuovo, developer of *Pocket God*; and David Whatley, developer of *Tiny Heroes* and *geoDefense*.

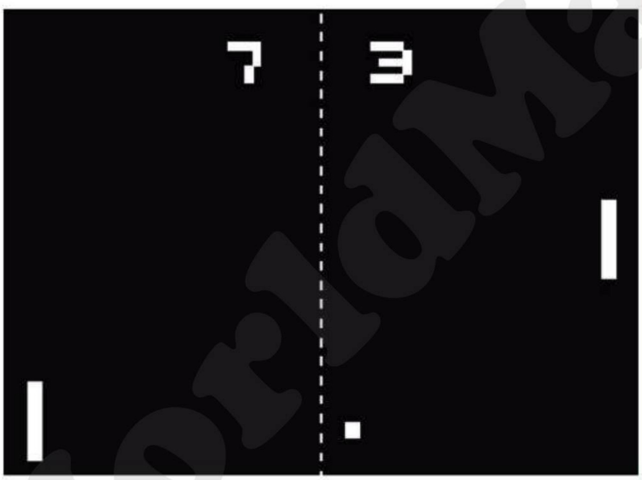
Nolan will work with the other judges to select and rank the top ten finalists based on fun factor, creativity, originality, visual appeal and marketability. Final winners will be determined collectively by Atari, the judging panel, and votes received from the Atari community.

RG: What key things are you looking for from submissions?
MP: We’re looking for a new take on *Pong* that will entertain those of us who loved the original while offering something fresh and fun for new audiences. The beauty of *Pong* is its simplicity, accessibility and how much fun it can be against another player, so these qualities should be retained and presented in a new way.

RG: What sort of response have you had so far?
MP: Response so far has been great! The community seems to really be appreciating the chance to create an official new version of an iconic gaming brand, and we have a healthy number of submissions thus far.

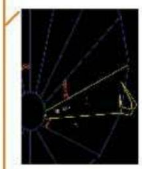
At this point in the process we are reviewing some very interesting design docs for the semi-finalist selection and can’t wait to get our hands on game builds!

RG: Can we expect a similar treatment for any of the other classic Atari games on their milestone anniversaries?
MP: In regards to specifically hosting contests in this format, we haven’t announced any further plans for our other titles. That said, we’ll definitely continue to bring more of our classic franchises to the App Store. Most recently we’ve released *Asteroids: Gunner* and *Breakout: Boost*, two new versions of our most recognisable titles. As we support these games with updates and new content, you can be sure we’re also working on some exciting new games that we can’t quite talk about yet. *



Remake these!

Other Atari titles that we’d love to see remade and updated for iOS



Tempest

Surely this one is a no-brainer? Dave Theurer’s *Tempest* is a fantastic blaster, with simple controls that would transfer well. Jeff Minter loves *Tempest* and also happens to make iOS games. A match made in heaven?



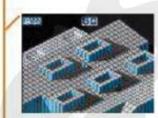
Klax

This was an excellent puzzle game, thanks to its impossibly bright visuals, simple mechanics, clean interface and great sound. Puzzle games are popular on iOS and it should also be easy to remake, as you could do neat little things like throw tiles back with a flick of your phone.



Super Sprint

There are numerous ways you could approach *Super Sprint*. One would be to opt for a virtual control system for steering your car. We’d quite like to see a tracing mechanic similar to *DrawRace*, where you simply draw a route with your finger. Make it happen, Atari.



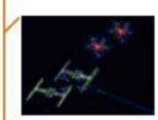
Marble Madness

Mark Cerny’s classic coin-op is excellent fun and would work a treat on iOS. You could either use the accelerometer to tilt your marble around the mazes, or use a virtual trackball. Continual play could be assured via time-based online leaderboards.



Warlords

A fantastic multiplayer game with simple but effective mechanics that retains a timeless quality. We could easily see a remake transferring well to iOS, while a solid online infrastructure would ensure that it captured the frantic, competitive fun of the original game.



Star Wars

Atari’s vector-based coin-op was a massive success in its day, and we could easily see that being replicated on iOS. Move your cursor with the accelerometer controls, or simply by moving it around with your finger. Actually, that last method sounds like a terrible idea.

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. He used to present *The 11 O'Clock Show*, but please don't hold that against him. You can find more information about Iain at **www.iainlee.com**



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits and The 11 O'Clock Show, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro gaming

Soundtrack of Our Lives

Soundtracks to games are very important. The music that you hear while playing can totally transform the gaming experience. The breakthrough moment for me with in-game music was with *WipEout*. Mixing a futuristic, high-speed hover-machine racing game with hip (the fact I use the word hip instantly means I am not hip) dance music was a stroke of genius. It was so powerful, it not only elevated the game into something very magical, but also contributed to the PlayStation being the gaming choice of the twenty-something generation.

I know a lot of you have affection for the blips and beeps used in early games. Sure, the ping of *Pong* is wonderful, and some of you may even dig that hideous monstrosity at the start of *Manic Miner*, but when I was younger I needed a bit more to wet my ear-whistle. The music I chose to play (on vinyl, kids) while I was playing, was vitally important. I've mentioned before how Frank Sidebottom was a massive part of my teenage soundtrack. I also remember one Christmas getting *Monty Python's Contractual Obligation Album* and playing it over and over while trying to dock on *Elite*.

But the main sounds for my gaming soundtrack came from the greatest fictional group that never really existed, The Monkees. They were and still are my biggest obsession in life. (Well, apart from my kids, but if I did see a complete collection of *Monkee Business* fanzines on eBay for a few thousand dollars, the boys would have to go hungry. Sorry, lads.)

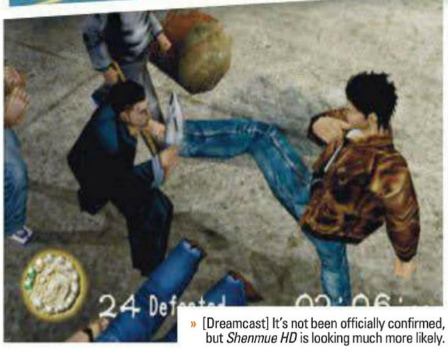
One of the lead singers of The Monkees, Davy Jones, died a few weeks ago. I say 'one of the lead singers' as all the obits seemed to have ignored the fact that Micky Dolenz sang lead on more tracks! I was singing 'Daydream Believer' to my eldest, the one song guaranteed to get him to sleep, when I got a text from a friend telling me Davy had passed. My reaction will probably amuse a lot of you, and it certainly shocked me, but I burst into tears. Now, I'd always been scornful of the 'idiots' that mourned when Jacko died, and the furore around Houston was a mystery to me, but I became one of those saps that wept when a celeb dies.

Why was I crying? Well, partly because I am a huge fan and it was a shock. But having thought about it, I realise now that it was more than that. The Monkees had been with me since I was six years old and used to watch the repeats in the school holidays. They had been the soundtrack to my life, and in particular, my formative years as a gamer. My happiest memories are of trying to get games to load and listening to the pre-fab four. When Davy died, so did my childhood. It sounds melodramatic, but reminders of our own mortality are always scary.



The music you hear while playing can totally transform the gaming experience





» [Dreamcast] It's not been officially confirmed, but *Shenmue HD* is looking much more likely.

THE RETURN OF RYO?

SHENMUE HD AND SKIES OF ARCADIA HEADING TO XBOX LIVE?

A recent interview about *Jet Set Radio HD* saw Sega heavily hinting that both the *Shenmue* series and *Skies Of Arcadia* would also be coming to Xbox Live Arcade and PSN later this year. When asked about incoming games, Sega USA's Ben Harbone told GameReactor: "I can tell you what it's going to be. It's going to be *Shenmue,* and *Skies Of Arcadia* as well. Those are a couple of our most requested games, and I can't say 'yes' or 'no' but we may be working on them."

What's more interesting however is that Gamerzine dropped the bombshell that not only were both *Shenmue* and its sequel heading to digital services, but, according to an industry insider, Sega had been sitting on both titles for over a year while they contemplated the future of the franchise.

We can't see *Shenmue III* ever appearing as a retail release, but episodic content would work perfectly on digital services. It would also allow Sega to simply use the engine that will be powering the HD versions, which could hopefully keep costs down and ensure continuity. It's wishful thinking, of course, but stranger things have happened.

We're also pleased about the thought of revisiting *Skies Of Arcadia*, as it's a fantastic RPG that never got the attention it deserved, despite appearing on both Dreamcast and Nintendo's GameCube. Needless to say we'll have more information as this exciting saga unfolds over the coming months.





» [PC] If you can't wait, it's worth remembering that a complete version of *Baldur's Gate* is available now from www.gog.com for $9.99.

BALDUR'S GREAT

HIT RPG BALDUR'S GATE TO BE AVAILABLE ON IPAD

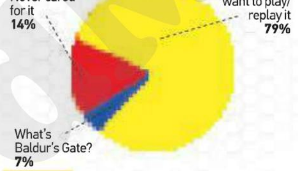
It's recently been announced that the hit Bioware PC game, *Baldur's Gate*, will be heading to iOS. A recent countdown revealed that the classic *Dungeons & Dragons* RPG set in The Forgotten Realms will be getting an iOS overhaul and is due to be released this summer.

Baldur's Gate was first released in 1998 and immediately won accolades thanks to its excellent story, entertaining characters and well-structured combat. Widely recognised for breathing fresh new life into the *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise, it won numerous awards and went on to sell over 2 million copies. It also went on to spawn an expansion pack, *Tales Of The Sword Coast,* which is included in the remake, as well as a standalone sequel *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn*, which was released in 2000.

Developer Overhaul Games is keeping a lot of information about *Baldur's Gate: Enhanced Edition* under wraps, but we do know that it will feature an enhanced version of Bioware's Infinity Engine, a brand new adventure (although it's unclear if this will be a similar size to *Tales Of The Sword Coast*) and a brand new character who currently remains a mystery. It will also feature an intuitive touchscreen system and will be compatible with all versions of the iPad. Expect a review in an upcoming issue.

FORUM OPINION

Are you excited about *Baldur's Gate: Enhanced Edition*?



theantmeister
I can't wait! I never played this back in the day and I'm discovering, thanks to Square, that the iPad is the perfect RPG machine.

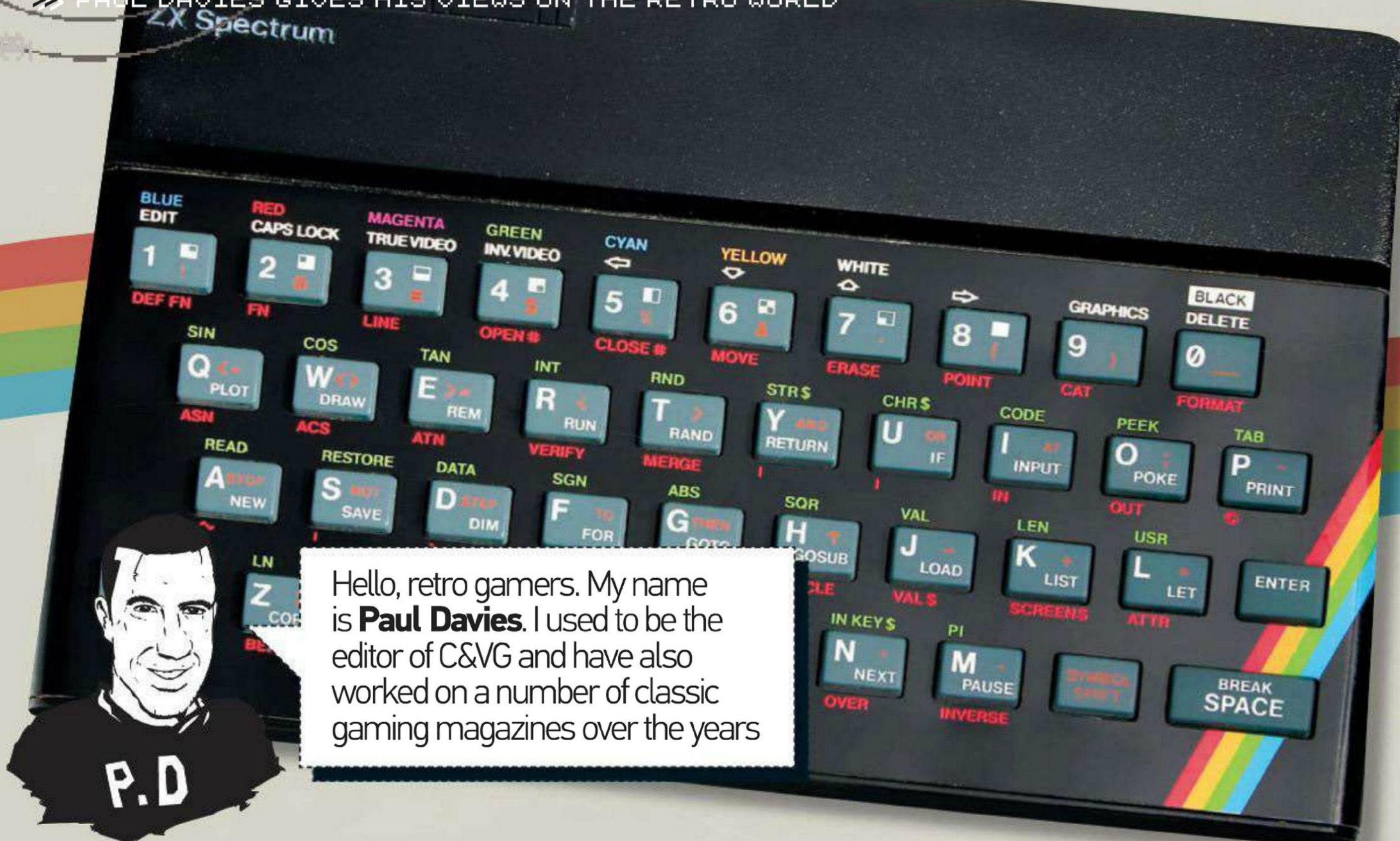
Lorfarius
It's already claimed close to 150 hours of my life. I think another walkthrough in a Wizard's robe is in order to celebrate!

Freestyler
Don't have an iPad, but I'd certainly get it if I did. *Baldur's Gate* is a great franchise!

retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

Spectrum-tinted spectacles

In 1982, I was listening to New Romantic compilations before turning to Iron Maiden and Whitesnake. The previous year my parents bought our first colour TV. My schoolmate was more advanced – his family had a Ferguson Videostar and a ZX Spectrum.

Synth pop made the early Eighties feel like we were living in the future, or at least with our noses pressed against the final frontier. We had acts like Madness to remind us that we were still normal and had to keep a sense of humour about it. But there were also Classix Nouveaux and Ultravox to reassure everyone that very modern life really must be this mysterious.

By age 14 in 1983, I was in charge of my own record deck and a portable cassette recorder (stereo) at home. As far as my schoolmate was concerned, this meant that I knew how tricky things worked. Therefore I was in charge of loading the games on his Spectrum, a task that I decided I should be rewarded with by having the first go on whatever it was. I'd hog the keyboard for as long as possible, repeating all the stages of *Jetpac*, and he'd make up for this by being the absolute best at *Manic Miner*.

One of the greatest things about the ZX Spectrum was that it had the feel of a toy. It wasn't a serious computer; it was small and funky with blue-grey rubber buttons and that trademark rainbow stripe. It had one wire going into the back of the overheating telly, another into the AC Adapter, and lastly into the tape machine. Mainly it was colourful – that was the big association for me.

My mate had his just thrown on the floor, surrounded by tape cassette cases and saucers holding half-eaten slices of marmalade on toast. If we didn't need the keyboard to play games it would've been upside down too. There was absolutely no ceremony about it. Nothing majestic or high-powered; just fun. It was light relief from the more serious business of learning the lyrics to 'Murders In The Rue Morgue'. I'd spend ages cleaning my LPs before dropping the needle on them.

Before Nintendo hit its stride with the NES years later, the ZX Spectrum was already repositioning videogames as something other than intimidating arcade coin-ops. You had to pluck up courage, and a couple of quid, to stand before *Moon Cresta* or *Dragon's Lair* down the chippy, but you could spend all day figuring out what to do next in *The Hobbit* at home, with marmalade on toast on tap.

So there were me and my mates, and hundreds of other kids at school, who had all made a lifestyle choice. We were geeks before we'd even heard the term mentioned; a sort of secret society trading cassette tapes at lunchtimes containing either untold magic or tragic shit, to be casually evaluated soon after our evening meals, shortly before squinting through the distortion lines of a rented horror movie or a recording of *The Young Ones*.

I reckon every gamer in the UK, if not the world, has much to thank the ZX Spectrum for. It bought Nintendo time to perform its famous rescue mission, the apparent videogame revival after Atari got too drunk at its own party.

Cheers, Clive.

One of the best things about the ZX Spectrum was that it had the feel of a toy

HOW MUCH!?

SUPER RARE NEO-GEO GAME SELLS FOR A SMALL FORTUNE

Until a few short months ago, nobody believed that a US version of *Aero Fighters 3* on the Neo-Geo AES existed. A chance email from an anonymous stranger, later revealed to be a former SNK employee, not only proved that the game was real, but led to said title being sold for over $30,000.

Neo-Geo fan Michael DiCioccio (or TonK, as he's known at Neo-Geo.com), who sold the extremely sought after game, reveals how a chance meeting led to one of the biggest retro finds of recent history.

"During one of our lengthy conversations, we started discussing prototypes and the Master List on Neo-Geo.com. He asked me why *Aero Fighters 3* wasn't on the list. I told him that it was, but it was a Japan-only release. He was adamant a US version existed and that he had one. He later called me and told me that he was going to prove that he had a copy. I told him to go ahead, as I didn't believe him.

"It turned out that he wasn't lying. I contacted [long-time friend and collector] Mikhail Kiselgof and John Thacker about the find. I've known these guys for a long time and trust both of them with my life. Mikhail was blown away [at the news]. What really surprised me was what John said. I'll never forget him yelling in the phone: 'I FREAKING KNEW IT EXISTED!' That's when I became very excited and less suspicious."

Months passed and DiCioccio heard little new information from his contact. Despite insisting that he simply hadn't found the game yet, DiCioccio and Thacker began to wonder if the story was an intricate lie. Then the pictures turned up…

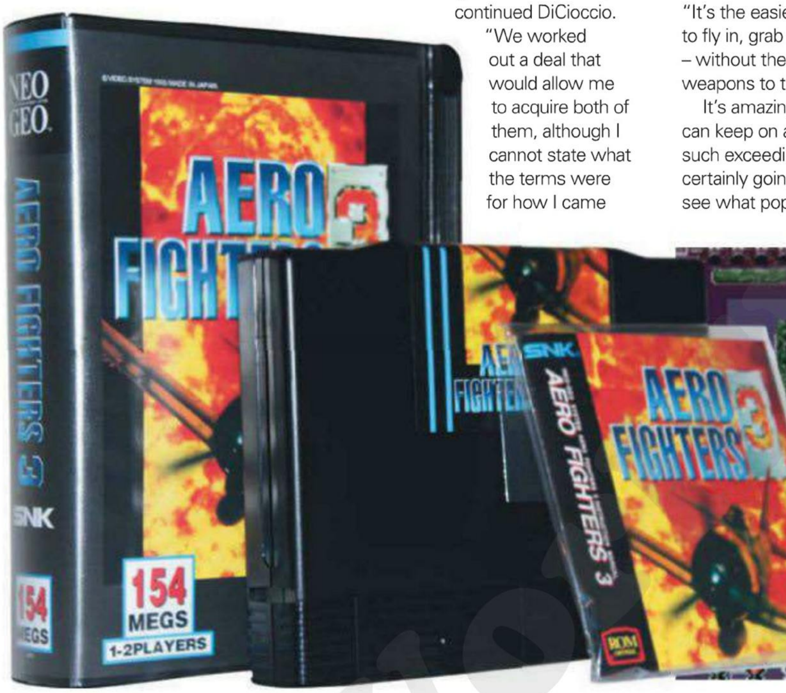
"I first saw photos of *Aero Fighters 3* in late January," continues DiCioccio. "I was convinced he had made the game himself and even asked him. He said he had purchased it directly from SNK back in 1995." Convinced he was onto something big, DiCioccio asked how many copies were available and if he would be able to acquire them.

"He said he had found two copies and that he might have one more," continued DiCioccio. "We worked out a deal that would allow me to acquire both of them, although I cannot state what the terms were for how I came into ownership of them. When I first looked at it, I thought it was fake, because there was no way I could be this lucky in owning the rarest and most expensive game that ever graced the Neo-Geo library. Upon further inspection, I knew it was real but needed an expert to see it and make a report on it."

DiCioccio got in touch with Thacker and sent him the copy for verification. After a lot of scrutiny and various steps, Thacker was able to confirm its authenticity. DiCioccio found collectors who were interested in buying the games. He was understandably unwilling to reveal the names of the buyers or how much he sold *Aero Fighters 3* for, but he did hint that each copy was eventually sold at the Pittsburgh airport for over $30,000, with the exception of one, which was shipped. They sold for more than *Kizuna Encounter* and *Ultimate 11*, the previous jewels of most Neo-Geo collections.

We were intrigued by the airport meet, as it sounded very cloak and dagger, but the reason for it is understandable. DiCioccio explains: "It's the easiest place for someone to fly in, grab the game, and leave – without the fear of anyone having weapons to try any shenanigans."

It's amazing that unknown games can keep on appearing, and selling for such exceedingly high prices. It's certainly going to be interesting to see what pops up next. *





» *Sonic Wings*, as *Aero Fighters* is known in Japan, has always been good fun. Part three is no different.

MONEY SPINNERS

More retro rarities that sell for silly money

>> Stadium Events



Bandai's *Stadium Events* was released for the NES in 1987 and was compatible with the Family Fun Fitness mat. Only 200 copies were released in the US, and a sealed one sold on eBay for $41,300 in 2010.

>> Air Raid



2010 saw another rare sale, when Tanner Sandlin from Texas recognised an old videogame that he owned on the Atari 2600. He had the only known copy that was first-generation owned and still complete, and as a result sold it for $31,600.

>> Nintendo World Championships 1990



This cartridge was created in 1990 when Nintendo held a 30-city gaming tournament. 90 grey copies were given to winners and sell for between $4,000 and $6,000, while the rarer gold cartridge goes for as much as $21,000.

>> Kizuna Encounter



While Japanese copies of *Kizuna Encounter* are common, selling for around $50, the European version is much rarer; experts believe that only around 15 copies were made. As a result, it typically sells for around $13,000.

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH



Retroware TV DVDs

- **RRP:** $14.95 - $19.95 each
- **Buy it from:** retrowaretv.com

A source for hilarious, insightful and passionate shows dedicated to retro gaming, Retroware TV is like having a dedicated online television channel about the topic. The passionate and knowledgeable team behind the website clearly knows its stuff, and have put out a series of DVDs collecting up some of its most popular shows, best bits and whole seasons. Each is packed with reviews, retrospectives and intelligent discussion about the halcyon days of gaming.



Big Money Prizes Tee

- **RRP:** $18 plus delivery
- **Buy it from:** meatbun.us

Meat Bun is currently doing a spot of spring cleaning to make room for new stock, and has slashed prices on a whole bunch of its T-shirts. Among those on sale include this awesome *Smash T.V.* tee. Featuring the game's iconic bosses, busty assistants and, of course, some big-money prizes, it's a fantastic design that captures the tone and insanity of the game.

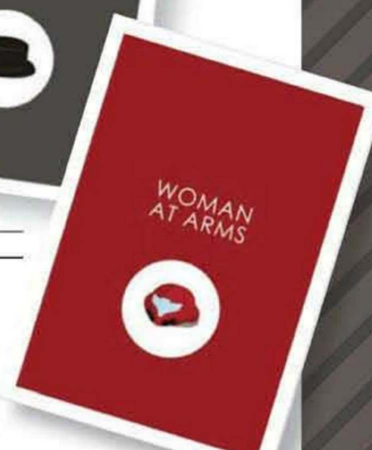


Splatterhouse Mask

- **RRP:** $24.99
- **Buy it from:** clubnamco.com

If you've ever dreamt of owning your very own Terror Mask then you'll be pleased to know an irresponsible Namco Bandai is currently selling them for just $25. Who'd of thought such a dangerous and malevolent piece of Mayan face fashion could be purchased for such a snip? Clearly someone hasn't watched *Halloween 3: Season Of The Witch*.





Retro Prints

- **RRP:** £18.00 includes postage
- **Buy it from:** retrogt.com

A new arrival at RetroGT, these cool retro posters take inspiration from games such as *Metroid* and *GoldenEye 64*. Stylishly understated, these high-quality A2 prints all share a quirky theme: a phrase accompanied by an iconic hat relating to a classic videogame. All completely original designs by the guys, you'll need to head on over to their website to bag one.



Game Gear Cufflinks

- **RRP:** £8.99
- **Buy it from:** amazon.co.uk

If you've lost your stapler and are desperately looking for something to fasten the cuffs together on a posh shirt while at the same time show your love for Sega's glorious 8-Bit handheld, why not purchase yourself a set of these rather natty Game Gear cufflinks? Posh shirt not included.

A MOMENT WITH…

Lloyd Mangram

To celebrate the Spectrum's 30th birthday, we've tracked down the bag-wearing hero who looked after the letters on Crash and Zzap!64



Who is Lloyd Mangram?

Lloyd Mangram rose to infamy as the letters editor for *Crash* magazine, and later *Zzap!64*. Numerous reports over the years suggest that he was actually the creation of Newsfield co-founder Roger Kean, and not actually real. If that was the case, then how did we get this interview?

How did you get your job on *Crash*?
I was acquainted with Roger Kean and Oliver Frey from London days. More importantly, I owned an electric typewriter and they couldn't afford one, so I came with the equipment that was essential for a magazine in those PC (pre-computer) days.

What did a typical day consist of?
My task for the first issue of *Crash* was to write all the letters because, logically, no one knew about the magazine. And then I had to think up and write the answers to my own letters. Then it got easier. After a breakfast – two eggs over-easy, bacon, black pudding, devilled kidneys and a Ludlow breakfast sausage – I opened the mail and sorted Forum letters from other items. After lunch – toasted ham and cheese with a glass of Rioja Reserva – I typed up the letters and my considered and reasonable responses. Every letter published got an answer. That in between herding local kids coming in for their review cassettes. It was hard work, I can tell you.

How many letters would you receive?
By the third issue, Carol Kinsey took over the mail sorting so I could concentrate on the Forum and later Zzap! Rrap. Once Newsfield was up and running, letters overwhelmed me – between 200 and 300 a month for each title. And our readership was literate and profligate. Some letters ran to more than four pages!

Did you ever write reviews?
Crikey, I never had the time to play games, and it would have been a wee bit hard with a paper bag over my head whenever visitors were in the building.

Which mag did you prefer working on?
On *Crash* I was my own man and Roger Kean, as editor, trusted me. But on *Zzap!* the egregious Julian Rignall stuck his oar in and altered what I'd written. We came to blows over that, but at least Gary Penn let me have the last word… sometimes.

What was your favourite Spectrum game and why?
Jet Set Willy, because Matthew Smith showed me how to get through it to the point I could do it with a paper bag over my head and amaze family and friends.



» [Spectrum] Lloyd is a big fan of *Jet Set Willy* and can complete it with a paper bag on his head.

Were you ever tempted to make games instead of writing about them?
Good grief, no! I could just about manage a typewriter, but write code… When they gave me an Apricot computer to replace the trusty Smith Corona I fainted.

Tell us an interesting anecdote about your time in the games industry.
Watching Roger Bennett speak about a serious issue at an industry dinner after too many glasses of wine. Amazingly, he got everyone laughing along with him. Other than that, I enjoyed watching the prima donna reviewer stars humping in the thousands of subscription copies every month. I was exempted due to my old war wound – sprained wrist from typing.

Are you really real?
After retiring from the games business, I founded the Lloyd's Pharmacy empire, as noted by more than one former reader on the Def Zzap! website.

How has the games magazine industry changed since you started on *Crash*?
Staff writers' finger strength has declined severely. It took a lot of muscle power to drive a typewriter, using all ten digits, even with a powered carriage return.

» Lloyd later went on to appear in the retro section of **games™**.





» Lloyd made his debut in issue 1 of *Crash* magazine.



retrodiary

27 April – 23 May

>> A month of retro events both past and present



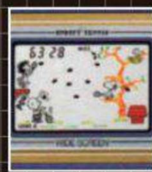
27 April 2000

The Legend Of Zelda: Majora's Mask on the Nintendo 64 debuts in Japanese stores.



27 April 2012

■ TellTale Games' point-and-click adventure based on Back To The Future finally gets released in box form.



28 April 1982

■ *Snoopy Tennis* is the latest release in Nintendo's series of Game & Watch handheld games.



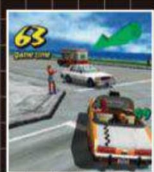
28 April 2006

■ A sequel to the classic smash-'em-up *Rampage* is released on PS2 and GameCube. *Rampage: Total Destruction* was later released on the Wii.



5 May 1995

■ *Knuckles' Chaotix* by Team Sonic is released exclusively on the Sega 32X across Europe.



3 May 2002

■ Gamers are treated to a choice of racing games, with *Crazy Taxi* and *Burnout* being released the same day on the GameCube.



1 May 1991

■ *Flicky* is released on the Mega Drive. Save the Chirps and avoid Iggy The Iguana!



29 April 1991

■ *G-LOC: Air Battle*, developed by Sega-AM2, is released in Europe on Sega's Game Gear handheld console.



8 May 1965

■ Keiji Inafune, the designer of the videogame character Mega Man, is born.



11 May 1995

■ America sees the release of the Sega Saturn console, six months after its worldwide debut in Japan.



12 May 2009

■ Gamepark Holdings releases its latest handheld, the GP2X Wiz.



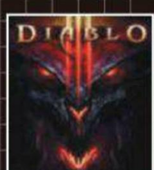
13 May 1976

■ Atari introduces a new coin-op to arcades; the bat, ball and wall world of *Breakout* has been unleashed.



18 May 2012

■ Rockstar Games is due to finally release *Max Payne 3* on Xbox 360 and PS3.



15 May 2012

■ Blizzard Entertainment's *Diablo III*, the next instalment of the fantasy horror franchise, is due for release on the PS3 and Xbox 360.



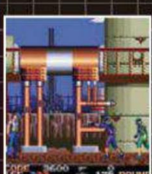
15 May 2003

■ *Enter The Matrix*, the first videogame released based on the *Matrix* trilogy, is released in Europe on GameCube, Xbox and PS2.



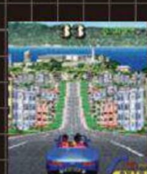
14 May 1949

■ Walter Day, founder of Twin Galaxies, which tracks videogame high scores and world records, is born.



19 May 1993

■ The third and final *Rolling Thunder* game is released on the Sega Genesis. Disappointingly, it never makes it to Europe.



21 May 1993

■ The fourth game in the *OutRun* series, *OutRunners*, makes its worldwide debut in the arcades of Japan.



22 May 1980

■ The highest-grossing arcade coin-op of all time is released and an icon is born. Here be *Pac-Man*. Waka-waka-waka-waka…



24 May 2012

■ The new issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets!

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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



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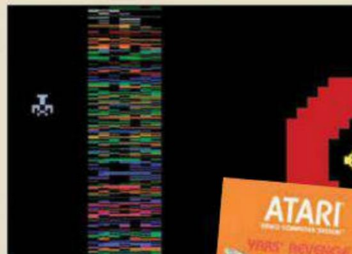
JULY 1982



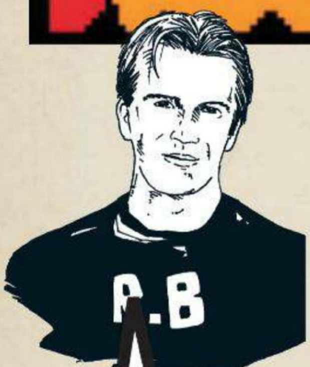
ARCADE COIN-OPS

1. Pac-Man (Namco/Midway)
2. Tempest (Atari)
3. Defender (Williams)
4. Centipede (Atari)
5. Battle Zone (Atari)

» [Atari 2600] *Yars' Revenge* was an original, challenging game. It also made a bucketload of money for Atari.







JULY 1982 – Binatone has computer hopes, Sinclair wants to get some Spectrums out, Atari offers free comics, the Yars want Revenge, Magnavox goes European and a microsurgeon cures your Intellivision ills. Dr Burton prescribes a shot of retro gaming

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 1982

Binatone, maker of umpteen TV game variants – all consisting of different forms of *Pong* – announced a venture into the home computing market with its proposed new computer, which it hoped to be ready for December. The 16K colour computer would be manufactured in Asia, imported over to the UK and sold for £49.95.

There wouldn't be a big mark-up from the manufacturing price, as Binatone intended to keep it as cheap as it could and make its money by shifting a large volume of units. It was estimating sales of around 300,000, and planning to sell via Woolworths and Rumbelows. Binatone also hoped its new machine would be a challenger to the new Sinclair Spectrum. It all sounded very promising except for one minor detail – it never got further than the planning stages.

At the same time, the Spectrum was suffering from technical problems; a design fault limited the number of Spectrums sent out. The entire production run stopped while Sinclair waited on new circuit boards to be manufactured, and had to push back delivery for most orders to late August. A few machines were getting out but these were being hand-modified at the production plant. It looked like that 28-day delivery date that Sinclair imposed on itself might get it into trouble again with Trading Standards.

There was better news for Sinclair with rising ZX81 sales in America. Having decided to push the machine in the US, Sinclair tested the water by making the machine available only via mail order, and through a special deal with American Express and holders of its credit cards. Sinclair received over 25,000 orders in the first half of June through this offer.

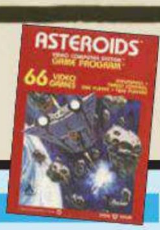
Similarly, Atari's marketing department had been putting their thinking caps on, and had come up with a promotion they thought would be a sure-fire winner: free comics! The idea was that gamers would buy the latest Atari 2600 game to obtain the next action-packed instalment and find out what happened to Atari's very own band of heroes, Atari Force.

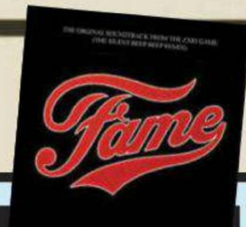
The first of a five issue miniseries featuring Atari Force, published by DC Comics, would be given away with *Defender*, the second issue with *Berzerk*, and then *Star Raiders*, *Phoenix* and *Galaxian*. How much of an impact this marketing ploy made to sales isn't clear, as the titles the comics were included with were all high-profile new releases and were presumably going to sell well anyway.



» [Intellivision] The first of its kind, the splendid *Utopia* was part god sim, part real-time simulation.







ZX81	
1	Mazogs (Bug-Byte)
2	Football Manager (Addictive Games)
3	Trader (Pixel Productions)
4	QS Defender (Quicksilva)
5	3D Monster Maze (J K Greye)

ATARI 2600	
1	Asteroids (Atari)
2	Missile Command (Atari)
3	Adventure (Atari)
4	Kaboom! (Activision)
5	Stampede (Activision)

MUSIC	
1	Fame (Irene Cara)
2	Abracadabra (Steve Miller Band)
3	Happy Talk (Captain Sensible)
4	Da Da Da (Trio)
5	Inside Out (Odyssey)

JULY 1982 NEWS

9 July saw Michael Fagan, an unemployed 31-year-old, break into Buckingham Palace. Managing to evade security and alarm systems he located the Queen's bedroom. He then spent ten minutes talking to her, before she managed to summon a footman who restrained Fagan until the police arrived.

On 2 July Larry Walters made use of his garden chair in an impressively bizarre way. His plan was to attach a few helium-filled weather balloons to the chair and float about 30 feet above his garden. He bought 45 large balloons, filled them with helium and attached them to his chair. Armed with a pellet gun to pop the balloons for a controlled descent he began his flight. Friends helped him become airborne and his anchoring rope was cut. The chair began to rapidly gain height and rose to 15,000 feet.

After 45 minutes in the air he nervously shot at some of the balloons and began to descend. He hit power lines, causing a blackout, but Walters managed to get to the ground unhurt and was promptly arrested. Asked why he did it, he replied, "A man just can't sit around."



» The best film in the *Star Trek* series.

The UK premiere of *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan* opened on 16 July, starring William Shatner as Admiral Kirk and Ricardo Montalbán as Khan Noonien Singh, a genetically engineered warrior. The Genesis Project, the death of Spock and that wormy thing that went in Chekov's lughole made for arguably the best *Star Trek* movie of them all.

Utopia for the Intellivision finally made it to the UK, almost a year after its US release. Created by Don Daglow for Mattel, *Utopia* was one of the first games that could be classed as both a god game and real-time simulation. A two-player game which saw each player take control of an island, players could construct new buildings by spending gold, fund rebel activity on an opponent's island, and build fishing boats for the income required to feed your growing populace. It was a very impressive and involving game that really stood out on the Intellivision. Mattel later released a version for its Aquarius home computer.

Intellivision owners were treated well this month with another unique game: Microsurgeon, published by Imagic. The aim of the game was to manoeuvre a tiny ship around the body and attempt to cure a patient. Some were modest ailments while some were distinctly nasty. Players set the level of severity, ranging from being fair to critical, and travelled through through the bloodstream dispensing medicine and performing micro-operations.

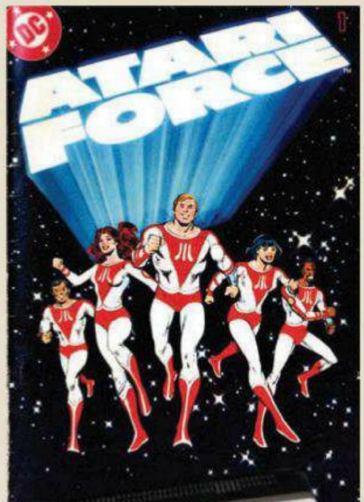
It had very bright, distinctive, chunky graphics and, despite the subject matter, provided a pleasantly quirky and original distraction from the tidal waves of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* clones swamping the marketplace. Sadly, it was initially restricted to the Intellivision, although conversions to PC and Texas Instruments' TI99/4A home computer followed later.

There was more console gaming happiness with the UK release of an Atari 2600 future classic, *Yars' Revenge*. Created by Howard Scott Warshaw, the man behind two other big-name 2600 titles – *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* – this was to be a game that would become a firm favourite with 2600 owners.

Despite looking like a relatively simple game, you soon found out that *Yars' Revenge* was deceptively testing, bordering on downright infuriatingly difficult. You played a giant space bug that had to fire through a shield protecting your enemy, the Qotile. You then had to destroy the enemy with a great big Zorlon cannon. This all occured while you tried to dodge the homing missiles sent out to kill you – though they could be avoided by hiding in the psychedelically-coloured neutral zone placed down the centre of the screen. *Yars' Revenge* sold tremendously well – and rightly so – even though it started out in life as a failed port of arcade game *Star Castle*.

Finally, it had been released in America nearly four years before, but Magnavox confirmed it would release its popular Magnavox Odyssey 2 console in Europe. However, rather than using the unfamiliar Magnavox name, it was decided that Philips, the parent company, would use its name instead. So with a target of Christmas 1982 put in place, the Philips Videopac G7000 was coming to Europe.

» The five part mini-series comic *Atari Force* was given away with selected new Atari 2600 releases.





» The Magnavox Odyssey II travelled across the Atlantic, becoming a Philips Videopac G7000 in the process.

THIS MONTH IN...

YOUR COMPUTER



YC interviewed former Sinclair designer Richard Altwasser about designing the ZX Spectrum. "People who work for Sinclair don't have many hobbies," he said, as well as "The VIC-20 is a second rate computer." He left Sinclair to create the Jupiter Ace.



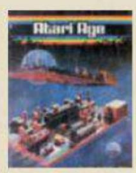
SINCLAIR USER



Another Richard Altwasser interview divulged an interesting titbit of info. When asked about the name of Sinclair's new micro, he revealed Jupiter was one of the rejected suggestions for the Spectrum that they liked but didn't use.



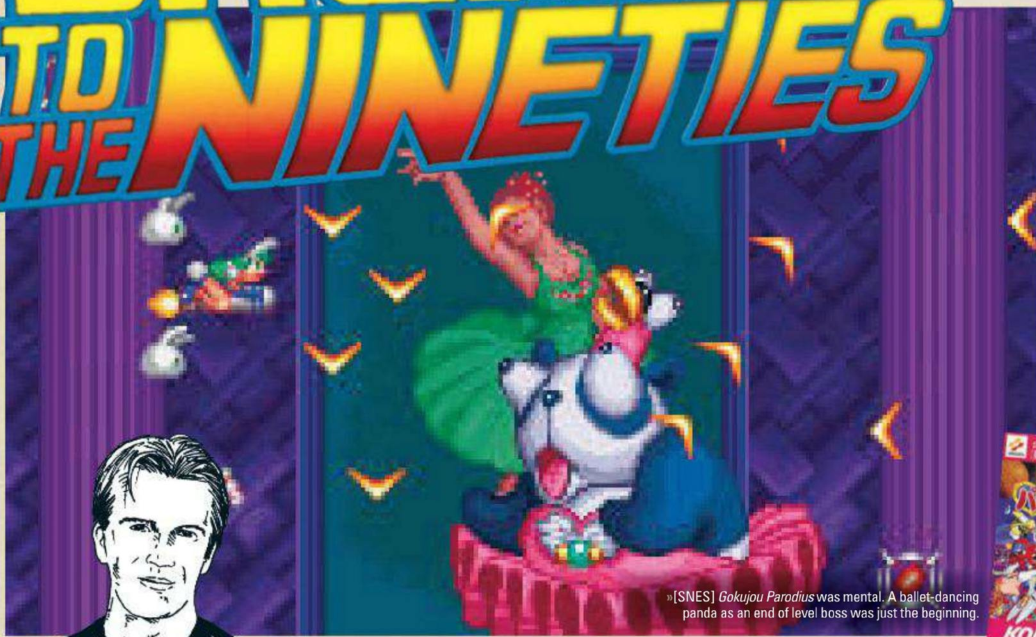
ATARI AGE



Atari didn't just make consoles and games, it also offered gift ideas. How about Atari earrings available in 24K electroplated gold? Or a head and wrist sweatband set? Or an Atari kite or Atari jacket or Atari Frisbee? You get the picture.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



»[SNES] *Gokujou Parodius* was mental. A ballet-dancing panda as an end of level boss was just the beginning.



CHARTS



JAN 1995

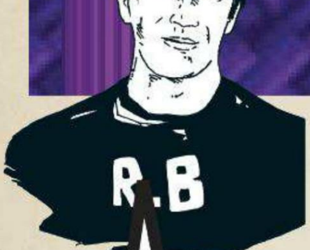
SNES

1. Super Mario All-Stars (Nintendo)
2. Stunt Race FX (Nintendo)
3. FIFA International Soccer (Electronic Arts)
4. Mortal Kombat 2 (Acclaim)
5. Starwing (Nintendo)

» [3DO] A good game for the 3DO finally arrived in the form of the excellent racer *The Need For Speed*.







THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1995

JANUARY 1995 – Midway has a Killer Instinct with Mortal Kombat III, 3DO gets Need For Speed, CD-i gets Burn Cycle, the 32X goes retro gaming, Konami goes bonkers and Pitfall! is back. Pitfall Burton gets stung on the gonads by a scorpion...

Arcade game maker Midway announced that the third instalment of its successful fighting franchise, *Mortal Kombat,* would be punching its way into arcades around the world in April with a swath of console releases following not far behind.

It could hardly be said that *Mortal Kombat 3* was long awaited, as the console versions of *Mortal Kombat 2* had only been released four months before. Midway was clearly milking the cash cow as hard as it could. Controversially, Midway dropped several fan-favourite characters for *MKIII*, including Raiden, Scorpion, Kitana and Reptile, and replaced them with a new cast. Stryker, Sindel and Nightwolf were among the new characters available. *Mortal Kombat* without Scorpion's cry of "Get over here!"? That's very nearly sacrilegious.

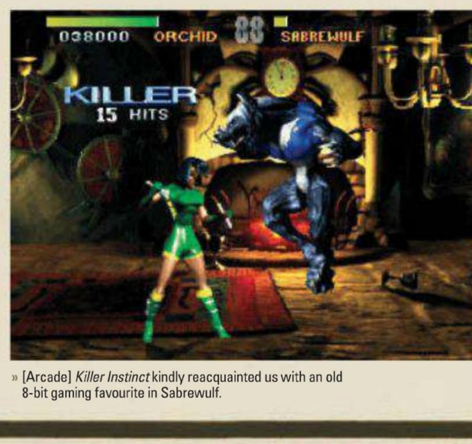
Another Midway fighting game, *Killer Instinct,* finally made it into European arcades this month. Developed by Rare, it was reportedly the first arcade game to contain an internal hard drive to hold the data required for the immensely detailed 3D pre-rendered graphics. Rare's recently released SNES game *Donkey Kong Country* used a similar process.

Despite the great-looking sprites and backgrounds, the game itself wasn't thoroughly play-tested and several glitches tainted what could've been an amazing game. However, there was the pleasing return of one of Rare's original characters from its Ultimate days: Sabrewulf.

Long suffering 3DO owners might have spent a small fortune on their system, but they were waiting for some truly awesome games to arrive. Their patience was about to be rewarded with a pair of top-drawer releases arriving in the UK. The debut game of what would become a long-running series, was *The Need For Speed* by Electronic Arts. A racing game with simulation elements, it was the best of its kind on the 3DO with remarkably good controls and realistic physics. Throw in the full-motion video cutaways to spruce up things and both EA and 3DO owners were on to a winner.

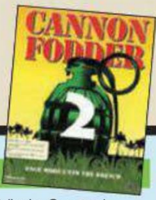
Then there was Capcom's release of *Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo*. It was a fantastic conversion of the arcade game and, combined with some equally splendidly remixed soundtracks, made *SSFII Turbo* a must-have 3DO game. The problem for the 3DO was that it wasn't a must-have console, even though the chunky square FZ-1 3DO interactive player produced by Panasonic, was due to be superseded with a slimmer, lighter and cheaper machine called the FZ-10. Would it make any difference to the 3DO's future? Nope. Discontinuation was 18 months away.

Another much lambasted gaming system was the Philips CD-i, yet even that was enjoying a good month, with one of the best games of its lifetime released this month, the infamous *Burn:Cycle*. Some might even argue that it was the very best game on the Philips CD-i. Developed by Trip Media, *Burn:Cycle* was an excellent point-and-click puzzle adventure, which saw you play a data thief infected with a killer neural virus who has just two hours to find the cure. *Burn:Cycle* had what most CD-i games didn't: an engaging storyline with a finely weighted balance of full-motion video against interesting and appealing game play. The cherry on the top was the techno

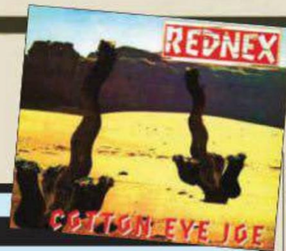


» [Arcade] *Killer Instinct* kindly reacquainted us with an old 8-bit gaming favourite in Sabrewulf.









AMIGA

1 Cannon Fodder 2 (Virgin Games)
2 Mortal Kombat 2 (Acclaim)
3 Football Glory (Black Legend)
4 Premier Manager 3 (Gremlin)
5 Rise Of The Robots (Time Warner)

GAMEBOY

1 Donkey Kong (Nintendo)
2 Power Rangers (Bandai)
3 Tetris 2 (Nintendo)
4 Wario Land (Nintendo)
5 Probotector 2 (Konami)

MUSIC

1 Cotton Eye Joe (Rednex)
2 Think Twice (Celine Dion)
3 Stay Another Day (East 17)
4 Love Me For A Reason (Boyzone)
5 There Comes The Hotstepper (Ini Kamoze)

soundtrack which provided a pounding beat to go with your thumping heart rate. The CD-i is often cited as being utter rubbish, but *Burn:Cycle* was a small island of light in a sea of bland educational titles and full-motion video overkill.

The Sega 32X was another system that suffered from apathy and poor software releases. Although Sega's next two 32X games, *Space Harrier* and *Afterburner*, were considered retro even by 1995 standards, they did feel strangely at home on the 32X and were excellent versions of the arcade games. Who needs new games anyway? Welcome to the Fantasy Zone.

If you liked your shoot-'em-ups to be bordering on the verge of a complete mental breakdown combined with a large helping of surreal bonkersness, then the latest *Parodius* title by Konami was just the ticket. Entitled *Ultimate Parodius* for the UK SNES, *Fantastic Journey* for the arcade release and *Gokujou Parodius* in its native Japan, the game set the bar of bizarreness at a whole new level.

Gameplay was naturally very similar to *Gradius*, being a parody of the game (hence the name) and would see you frenetically fighting waves of enemies, collecting power-ups, upgrading your character and flying through colourful, well designed yet slightly unhinged levels all splashed with colour. You could choose from eleven different characters, many lifted from other Konami games, and this theme was continued throughout the game with nods and in-jokes to various Konami titles.

Despite its outlandish graphics and eccentric design, *Gokujou Parodius* was terrific fun. It may have been mad beyond compare but the attention to detail was amazing. Sadly, the proposed UK SNES release never materialised so we had to be content with the Japanese imported version until the Sega Saturn and PlayStation conversions arrived 18 months later.

» [3DO FZ10] It was new, slim and lightweight, but it still couldn't save the 3DO format from its predictable fate.



If freaky scrolling SNES shooters were a bit scary for you, not to fear, you could settle yourself down with the comfort blanket of classic retro gaming nostalgia instead; the next addition to the excellent *Pitfall!* series. *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* was the sequel to David Crane's tremendous Atari 2600 classic. This time you play Pitfall Harry's son as you try to rescue the old man from the danger-filled Mayan jungle.

As great as it was to see an up-dated *Pitfall!* introduced to the SNES and Mega Drive, the game itself was just disappointingly short and far too easy to complete. Still, a nice touch was finding a fully-playable original 2600 *Pitfall!* game tucked sneakily away behind a hidden door, though some might say that the original was actually a better game than the game that hid it.



» [CD-i] *Burn:Cycle* was something of a rarity on the CD-i. It was actually very good.

JANUARY 1995 NEWS

9 January saw the death of Peter Cook, the highly influential satirist, writer and comedian, at the age of 57. He was remembered fondly for his comedy partnership with Dudley Moore in film, radio and television, which included the movies *Bedazzled* and *The Hound Of The Baskervilles*, the series *Pete And Dud*, and the downright filthy *Derek And Clive*.



» *The Hound Of The Baskervilles*, once again saw Peter Cook starring alongside Dudley Moore.

Ten years after his death, a television show called *The Comedian's Comedian*, a list show polling over 300 famous comedians, writers and TV producers named their most revered, influential and favourite comedians of all time. Peter Cook was number one.

On 25 January, the art of kung fu fighting was brought to the world of football thanks to Eric Cantona.

Manchester United were playing away at Crystal Palace when United's Eric Cantona was sent off for kicking Palace's Richard Shaw. On the way to the tunnel, Cantona launched a kung fu-style kick into the crowd, targeting a Palace fan who had been giving him verbal abuse. Following a trading of punches Cantona was led away.

The incident led to Cantona being banned for eight months, getting a fine, and treating us to his infamous most cryptic press conference quote: "When the seagulls follow the trawler, it's because they think sardines will be thrown into the sea. Thank you very much." No, Eric, thank *you* very much.

THIS MONTH IN...

AMIGA POWER



AP got to review *Rise Of The Robots*, listing good points against bad with the final tally reading one good point (the graphics) and 23 bad points (everything else). It was annihilated, received a 5% rating and was summed up as "an astonishing waste of time."



ULTIMATE FUTURE GAMES



Acclaim invited the *UFG* team to look around the set of the *Judge Dredd* movie, where an advert for its new SNES and Mega Drive game based on the movie was being made. Sadly the game was like the movie: nice to look at but completely awful.



AMIGA CD32 GAMER



CD32 Gamer conducted a lengthy interview with David Braben, creator of *Elite*, who talked about *Frontier: First Encounter*, the third game in the *Elite* series. You could tell Braben was excited about it but a falling out with publisher Gamtek ensured an early bug-riddled release and poor reviews.




PROTOTYPE2
18
PS3
XBOX 360
XBOX LIVE
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[PROTOTYPE®2]

WELCOME TO NEW YORK ZERO!

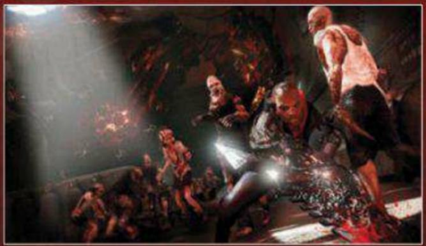
PROTOTYPE®2 takes the unsurpassed carnage of Radical Entertainment's original best-selling open-world game of 2009 - PROTOTYPE and delivers the most over-the-top action game of 2012. Cut a path through the viral wastelands of NYZ and build up a vast genetic arsenal as you hunt, kill and consume your way towards your ultimate goal... destroying Alex Mercer!

**'More brutal than Arkham City...
More bloody than Dead Space 2...
More freedom than Dark Souls...
Welcome to 2012's most destructive open world game.'**

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Transylvania

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT…

#49



» APPLE II
» PENGUIN SOFTWARE
» 1982

The walls in the computer rooms back when I was in junior high school were lined with nothing but Apple II hardware, and the ever-present phosphorous green glow of the monitors usually emitted the same old Bank Street Writer prose and VisiCalc data – dreadfully boring fare to the eyes of any normal sort of 12 year old, to be sure.

Once in a while though, there would pop up on the screens the only game allowed to be played on any of the systems in the school – as presumably it was deemed to be educational by the teaching fraternity. That games was Penguin Software's Transylvania, one of the excitingly progressive, new text adventures that featured graphics.

A classic two-word parser-driven adventure – but with the tremendously-welcome new addition of full-colour, high-resolution graphics – it sent a kid like me into near-hysterics, and forced me to try and find ways to remain locked in the room after hours just so I could get a proper go at the thing (needless to say, I did manage to obtain myself a copy and get to play it at home as much as I wanted – I must make a note to return the box to the school one day when I get time).

The basic premise of the game was to rescue Princess Sabrina by dawn, as she was held hostage by a vampire in his tower for whatever reason, but before confronting him with your usual vampire-eliminating tools you had to contend with such horrors as a menacing werewolf who simply refused to leave you alone; a raspberry-blowing goblin whose grin you'd dearly have loved to smack off his face; a cackling witch that you didn't get to see but heard frequently during your stay and whose broom you also got to ride; and, bizarrely, a UFO you got to summon and enter, just to make sure, no doubt, that this was one night you most certainly wouldn't be forgetting with any haste.

Atmospheric hand-drawn graphics with excellent use of colour and shading, a curious, everything-including-the-kitchen-sink story that meant things certainly never got boring, and precarious – basically non-existent – educational value ensured that this adventure game would become an all-time classic, and is one that is indeed still enjoyable to boot up and play for a good few hours today. Essential.

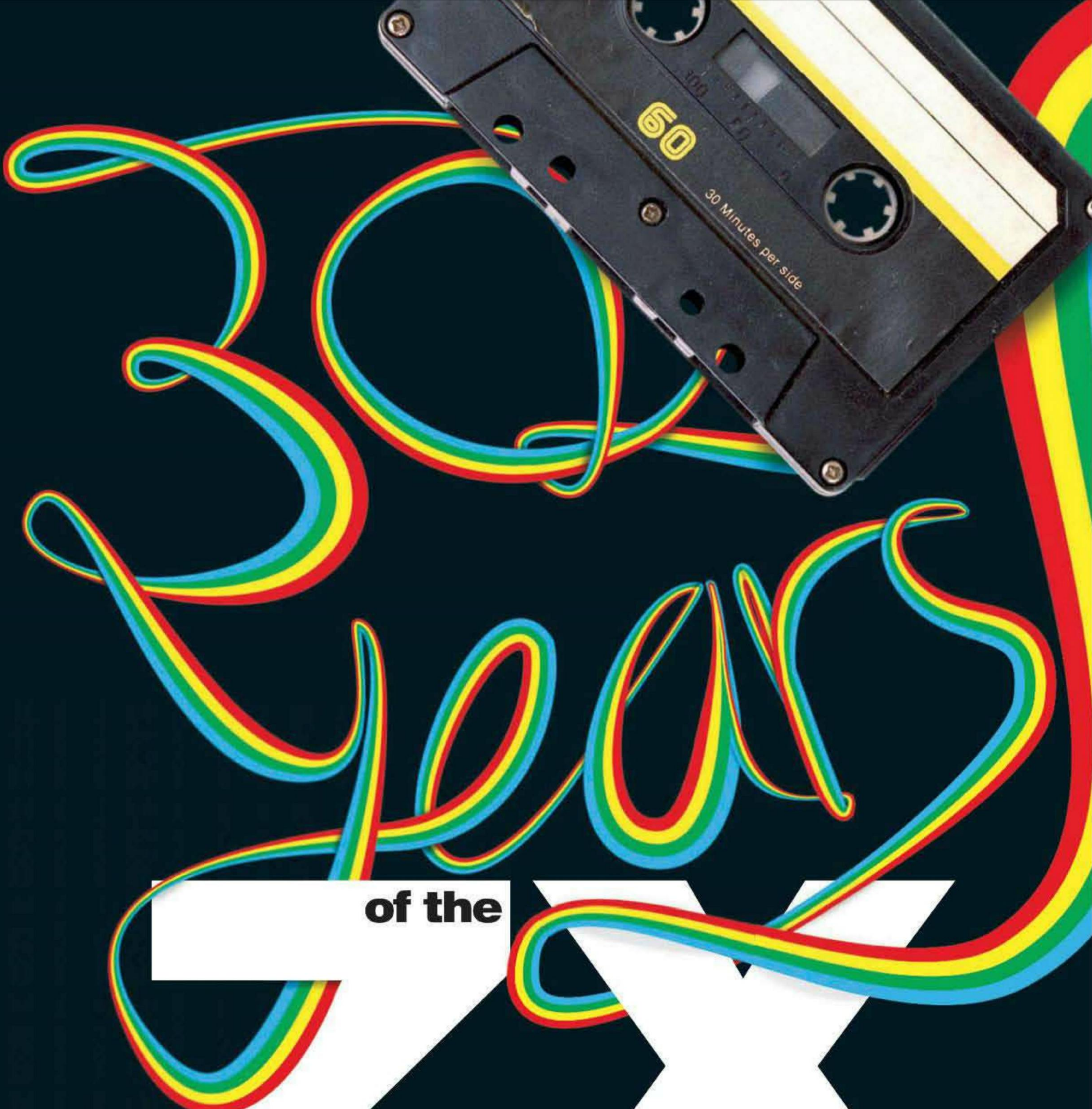




RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** ROB ROEMER
» **JOINED:** 13 MAY 2011
» **LOCATION:** MELBOURNE
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** COMMODORE AMIGA

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30 years of the ZX Spectrum



Continuing our celebration of the 30th anniversary of the ZX Spectrum, Graeme Mason takes up the story after its release and asks what made the Speccy so popular with developers, publishers and the public alike

It's September 1983. A young man stares wide-eyed from behind the counter of his computer shop on Bradford Street, Walsall. The man's name is Steven Wilcox, and he will soon have a big role to play in the 8-bit computer game market; for now, however, Steve is excitedly trying to calculate how many ZX Spectrums he can sell in one day.

"Whenever I hear these days of consoles such as the Wii being in huge demand and selling out," he says today, "I'm always reminded of the Spectrum and the frenzy there was about it." Somehow, the future founder of renowned publisher Elite Systems had managed to secure a large stock of the immensely popular computer for the Christmas period of 1983. Word had escaped and families were travelling from miles away just to get their hands on one of the iconic micros. Steve's younger brother, Richard, was in the shop as normal, experimenting with the computers and games.

"For me, as someone who had been into computer gaming for some years," he says, "it was like a validation. It was the beginning of gaming becoming mainstream." The Spectrum, released in April 1982, was still causing a sensation over a year later.

On the frontline

This is one of many stories from the ZX Spectrum's early days at the frontline. 165 miles further north, in Stockton-on-Tees, was Ian Richardson, who would go on to work for well-known software houses such as Ocean and Gremlin Graphics, and he tells a similar tale: "It really felt that Sinclair drip-fed the market, plus there weren't many places stocking them at the time, other than WHSmith and Dixons." Ian worked in his father's shop, TopSoft Computers. "My dad was interested in starting a retail business, and my love of computers – and especially gaming – persuaded him to open a computer shop. I explained carefully to him that it was not easy getting software in our hometown, as you were restricted to places such as Smiths and Woolworths.

Sinclair Research designer Rick Dickinson, responsible for the look and feel of the Spectrum, remembers the situation clearly: "There was a Spectrum frenzy. Stores sold out quickly, with queues of people appearing whenever there was news of fresh stock." The computer's popularity took Sinclair aback. "We were surprised, as it exceeded our highest expectations in terms of demand," continues Rick, "and despite our factories theoretically being able to meet demand, it was more a question of the supply chain and how quickly stock could be replenished." It was a popular rumour within Sinclair that during these early days, there were at least three lorries laden with Spectrums on the road at any one time, and a reported 12,000 units sold in each week of 1983.

Also working in sales early in the Spectrum's life was Gary Bracey, future software development manager for Ocean. "I started a computer games retail business in Liverpool, basically because of the ZX Spectrum," says Gary. "Although I had previously experienced the ZX81 and Acorn Atom, the Spectrum was really the one that brought these machines into the mainstream."

Future Ocean colleague, artist Mark Jones, was also captivated by the computer, although frustratingly for him, as with many others, the machine lay tantalisingly out of reach. "I was one of the last of my friends to get a Spectrum," he recalls with an air of mock sadness, "until one day I came home from school and my mother motioned me towards a box in the living room: there was a brand new 48K Spectrum!" Despite his excitement, Mark quickly discovered the problem that afflicted many Spectrum owners: most homes still only had one television! "I set the Speccy up as quick as I could, as I knew I didn't have long before Dad came home," says Mark wistfully. "*Danger Mouse* and *Newsround* I could do without, but I just had to cram some time in getting to know my new toy!"

A world of colour

Others were impressed on a technical level. Sinclair Research employee-in-waiting Rupert Goodwins, having previously purchased a ZX81 kit directly from Sinclair, remembers receiving a flyer through the post for the new machine. "I devoured the leaflet for every last



» [Spectrum] Budget specialist Mastertronic produced countless games for the Spectrum, and *Agent X* was one of its best.

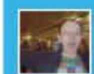
scrap of information and immediately started pestering my parents," says Rupert. "And when it arrived – oh, the colours! I loaded up the bundled tape and was awestruck by the saturation on the solitaire card game. All the things I'd wanted from my ZX81 were there: sound, lower case, multi-statement BASIC, proper graphics, colour and a keyboard that actually moved. Technically it was both familiar yet also dramatically different." With the 16K model soon reduced in price to below £100, the ZX Spectrum was flying off the shelves.

Back at Sinclair HQ, the unfortunate demise of the QL coupled with the Spectrum's popularity caused a rapid R&D turnaround based on two of the original model's much-discussed drawbacks: the rubber keyboard and the lack of an on/off switch. With the 16K and 48K Spectrums from 1982, you had to unplug the machine to clear its memory for another program. "The latter machines seemed a logical evolution," says Rick Dickinson, "and the squarer shape was simply following the QL design to emphasise that corporate look. I remember helping with this decision, and it basically boiled down to following the QL look due to lack of time. I often wonder how it would have turned out if we'd tried for its own individual design."

In any case, the Spectrum 48K+ was the first result, which, despite the injection-moulded keyboard, reset button and more business-like appearance, was essentially the same computer again – only with a much higher faulty return rate. "I glimpsed piles of Spectrums in the back rooms of stores," continues Rick, "but I think it was just one of the risks of rapid development." With the Spectrum+ now outselling the original rubber-keyed model, support from stores for the 16K dwindled away as customers consistently sought out the extra 32K of RAM – and the new keyboard. Despite this, canny computer stores, such as Ian Richardson's TopSoft, still did good business repairing and replacing keyboard membranes on the older machines in addition to upgrading the 16K Spectrums to 48K with the aid of a kit purchased from companies such as Datel Electronics.

So Sinclair was still pressing the business angle with its machines – yet what was really making them so popular? The answer was obvious: games. For a time, it felt like every other bedroom in the UK housed a young programmer, trying desperately to emulate the early successes of the Spectrum software scene such as Sandy White's *Ant Attack* and Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner*. Software houses run from back bedrooms sprung up everywhere,

THE HOMEBREW HERO



Jonathan Cauldwell

Author of Egghead, Albatrossity, Rallybug and many more

Retro Gamer: What were your impressions of the Spectrum, from an aesthetic and technical point of view?
Jonathan Cauldwell: It took me several months of saving up in 1983 to buy a second-hand Spectrum, and when I finally purchased it I remember the colours. So bright and vivid! The screen was a riot of green, yellow, blue, red… It was amazing! It had sound tool music, explosions and little men running around. It just blew me away. On the technical side, there was a lot of negative talk about the keyboard in the magazines, but nobody really cared. We just wanted to play games!

RG: What was it like programming on the Spectrum?
JC: It was never a lazy programmer's machine as you had to write a lot of code in order to do anything. You had to work out everything for yourself. This meant there was nothing to hide a programmer's talent or disguise their ineptitude. A Spectrum programmer is always naked.

RG: How did you view the purchase of the Spectrum brand by Amstrad?
JC: At the time I was appalled. I had an Amstrad cassette player for saving and loading, and it was so badly constructed I had to keep returning it to be repaired. Consequently, I feared the worst, although as it happened, Amstrad ended up building the most robust Spectrums of all.

RG: How would you explain the Spectrum's longevity?
JC: Its early success meant there were millions of Spectrums out there, and if you wanted to pick up a cheap machine to play games on there weren't many better options. Its simplicity also meant it could be cloned easily, so it remained popular in Russia and Eastern Europe, even after production of the machines stopped.

RG: Finally, you're still producing Spectrum games today. Why do you think even now the Spectrum has such a following?
JC: It was a simple yet powerful machine. It has a vast catalogue of games with dozens more still released every year and was incredibly popular throughout the world. With the clones and official units sold, a huge number of people had one at some time or another. The Spectrum isn't likely to be forgotten in a hurry!

The Ultimate Connection

It was the most famous of Spectrum developers, and for good reason…

JETPAC

The debut of Jetman, *Jetpac* took a dash of *Joust* and added a sprinkling of platforming and a large dollop of shooting. It was the company's first game on the Spectrum and a huge hit in 1983 thanks to its superior graphics and smooth, if limited, gameplay. Ultimate's high standard of presentation already marked it out as a developer of real potential, and eight years later *Jetpac* sat alongside *Wizball*, *Uridium* and *Zarch* as one of the greatest shoot-'em-ups of all time according to multiformat mag *ACE*. An XBLA remake appeared in 2007 courtesy of Rare and included the 1983 version, which reportedly sold over 300,000 copies when originally released.



ATIC ATAC

"It looked like an arcade game – but in my mate Neil's bedroom!" exclaims the former Ocean graphic artist Mark Jones, and it was impossible at the time not to be taken in by *Atic Atac*'s impressive appearance and frantic gameplay. Your job was to take charge of one of three types of warrior, each of whom had their own weapon, movement type and use of a secret passage pertaining to that character. Of course, there were lots of ghouls out to stop you escaping from the castle, although food and drink was left helpfully around to boost your warrior's strength. *Atic Atac* was a huge game for the time, boasting well over 50 screens when many titles were still single-screen affairs.



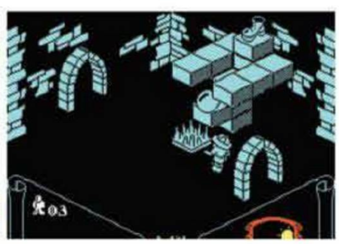
SABRE WULF

Sabre Wulf was the first outing for the iconic Ultimate character Sabreman, who would go on to appear in a further three adventures, as well as the unpublished *Mire Mare*. Following the form of *Atic Atac*, the player was stranded in a mysterious location and had to find parts of an amulet in order to escape. Even the cassette inlay set the mould for future Ultimate 'instructions', with an evocative tale of rocky glades, steep ravines and an ancient warning, yet little indication of the player's objective. Thrust into the hazardous jungle, Sabreman had to battle gorillas, snakes, scorpions and all manner of local wildlife in order to escape the labyrinthine set of 256 screens.



KNIGHT LORE

It's easy to look back now and fail to understand what all the fuss was about, but in 1984, *Knight Lore* was a revolution in graphics and game design. The Stampers took a big risk in going in this new direction – *Sabre Wulf* and *Underwurlde* had been big sellers and another 2D game in the series would still have been a surefire commercial, if not critical, hit – but it paid off spectacularly as *Knight Lore* captured the imagination of Speccy owners everywhere. Playing Sabreman again, the player this time not only had to contend with the extra dimension but also a lycanthropic curse that transformed him into a werewolf come night time…



> **"We were surprised, as it exceeded our highest expectations in terms of demand"**
>
> SINCLAIR DESIGNER RICK DICKINSON ON THE SPECTRUM'S INITIAL POPULARITY

and despite many being doomed to failure, the potential of the games industry quickly became obvious to the older generation. Ian Richardson, working in his father's shop in Stockton-on-Tees, remembers one game particularly well.

"The most exciting release at the time on the Spectrum was without doubt Activision's *Ghostbusters*," he confirms with a grin. "The Commodore 64 version had been released months before and Spectrum owners were understandably desperate for their version. Back then we usually bought 20 copies of a game for its day of release; for *Ghostbusters* we had taken 150 pre-orders, which was unheard of." When the big day finally arrived, customers were soon queuing outside TopSoft Computers, waiting for the Securicor van laden with the Activision film licence. "It was a mad, crazy day," concludes Ian. "In the end we didn't get one copy on the shelves as every person that came in that day was there simply to buy *Ghostbusters* on the Spectrum."

The ultimate developer

Despite the phenomenal success of *Ghostbusters*, the software house that undoubtedly had the most consistent sales over the majority of the Spectrum's life was Ashby Computers & Graphics Ltd – more commonly known as Ultimate Play The Game. After a clutch of 16K titles that themselves became iconic, Ultimate established a line of software of such pedigree that retailers were able to continue selling them well into the late Eighties, despite a hefty price tag of £9.99 for the majority of Ultimate's output.

Ocean's Mark Jones describes his first encounter with Ultimate's famous isometric 3D engine: "I rushed round to a friend's house, who had been showing off his new purchase at school. We went upstairs and there was *Knight Lore*, already loaded, and I was totally amazed. Back then it was like controlling a cartoon."



The Quicksilva connection

One of the earliest and biggest publishers for the Spectrum



ANT ATTACK

Quicksilva was so sure that it had seen something special in *Ant Attack* that it flew creator Sandy White to its offices and had a signed contract within 24 hours. It then applied for a patent for the routines behind the remarkable 3D graphics. *Ant Attack* was a huge hit and cemented Quicksilva's reputation as one of the premier software houses of the time.



TIME GATE

This more complex shooter was a step up from the normal *Space Invaders* or *Missile Command* clones. In *Time Gate*, the player took on the role of an unnamed fighter in a classic one-man-versus-the-empire story, travelling through time and eliminating the enemy craft. A complex tracking system coupled with a fast pace make *Time Gate* an underrated classic.



MINED-OUT

Future Incentive boss Ian Andrew cut his teeth with this fine strategy title. Under the game's blank field lay several randomly placed mines, with the goal being to make your way to the other side. Clicking on a square revealed how many mines lay on the adjacent squares. *Mined-Out* was graphically simple, yet an intriguing, original and addictive game.

Philip Oliver, one half of the Oliver twins, who were responsible for some of the bestselling games on the Spectrum, emphasises the importance of the Ultimate games. "The Spectrum saw many varied and experimental games, probably more than any other computer," he says, "and games popular today are often inspired by games on the Spectrum. For example, the 3D isometric game style is still popular, and used in all sorts of games such as *FarmVille*."

This new and exciting market for computer game software, despite causing a shortage of ZX Spectrums, didn't exactly go down well at Sinclair headquarters. "I think it's fair to say Sir Clive was disappointed that the Spectrum's main market was the games industry," says designer Rick Dickinson, "but to be honest we saw this even with the ZX80 and ZX81. Sir Clive fought it for a while, but I guess eventually he just accepted it for how it was, and I don't ▶

THE MAGAZINE EDITOR



Roger Kean

Ex-editor of Crash magazine

Retro Gamer: When did you first see a Spectrum?
Roger Kean: Franco Frey brought a 16K Spectrum to Ludlow one weekend. We plugged it in, loaded up some *Defender* clone, and it knocked us out. Of course, the graphics were simple, but there was no denying the excitement of seeing interaction on your own telly rather than in the arcades.

RG: Which Spectrum did you own personally?
RK: I never actually owned a Spectrum! First there was Franco's, and then we bought several as the magazine took shape, so it seemed pointless to own one myself.

RG: Why do you think the Spectrum was so popular, and for so long as well?
RK: A number of factors: price, especially when compared to other platforms, and the relatively low cost of the games. I believe the quality and the imagination of the gameplay also captured owners' hearts and easily matched what was available elsewhere. Oddly, the rivalry between the Commodore 64 and Spectrum probably helped as well.

RG: *Crash* was unashamedly all about the games. How did the reviewing system work?
RK: Indeed it was about the games, and deliberately so. Solid, detailed and honest reviews were what the teenage market cried out for, so that's what we gave them. The reviews, effectively created by Ludlow schoolboys, became so trusted that for several years WHSmith used pre-published page proofs as a buying guide for shelf stocking. Every day between one and five lads would come in and collect the latest pre-releases that the software houses had sent us and a form to fill in. Their reactions and comments, combined with two other reviews, formed the basis for the general write-up and the overall ratings. During the first year, our first employee, Matthew Uffindell, played through the games with me and we checked the validity of the boys' opinions, and I wrote the final game review. By the end of 1984 we had a solid core of part and full-time reviewers, which made my role less relevant. Unfortunately, the increased pressures of running practically every aspect of the editorial and production meant I also no longer had much time to play the games myself.

RG: When do you think was the best period for Spectrum games?
RK: I would put that at between late '84 and late 1986. There were good games before and after, of course, but it seemed like developers had reached a plateau of achievement thereafter. Designers in that period probably provided some of the finest gameplay ever, particularly games such as Matthew Smith's *Jet Set Willy*, Derek Brewster's *Codename MAT* and, of course, anything by Ultimate Play The Game.

RG: As you were actively involved in the industry, did you see the beginning of the end coming for the Spectrum?
RK: It was perfectly clear to us that the buoyancy in the 8-bit market in general had a limited shelf life. However, the 16-bit machines hadn't caught the public's imagination in the same way, so we were cautious about diving in too soon. Whether we anticipated the end of the Spectrum earlier is a moot point, but our response was to launch the multiformat magazine, *The Games Machine*, as well as other magazines outside the games market. Sadly, none of these added the necessary revenue to compensate for the falling sales of the 8-bit magazines.

THE GRAPHIC ARTIST



Simon Butler
Ocean Software

Retro Gamer: When did you first encounter the Spectrum and what were your initial impressions?
Simon Butler: I saw my first Spectrum when I went to work at Denton Designs. Although I was developing graphics on the C64, it was by then my gaming machine of choice. Anyone could see the obvious advantages the C64 had from a graphics point of view, but for some reason I was a Spectrum fan from day one.

RG: What was the first game you were involved in?
SB: That would be *The NeverEnding Story* for Ocean. Developing these graphics just felt right. Sure, it was totally different from paper and pencil, and the end result was never exactly what you saw in your head due to the character boundaries or colour limitations, but it came very easily and above all, it was fun.

RG: In comparison to the other formats, what was it like designing graphics for the Spectrum?
SB: To be honest, it was fairly easy, but not without its drawbacks. We always knew what we could and couldn't do, so we automatically worked to the Spectrum's strengths. If I had to make a comparison, I'd say the Spectrum's graphics were like a pen and ink drawing; you would attempt to do the best you could with black and white and then, if you felt really clever, you'd throw in a bit of colour. It was good for having details, and having square pixels made things a tad easier than on the other two 8-bit machines.

suppose he minded the business it brought in." Rick empathises with the Sinclair chief: "I guess I'd be similarly disappointed that the early computers were mostly used for entertainment, but today I think we should be thrilled that so many people in the industry learned their trade on a Spectrum."

By late 1984, with the 48K models still selling well, work began on the next step up: the 128K Spectrum. Joining the Sinclair team at this point was Rupert Goodwins, who would become a key member of this machine's development team. "My first task was in March of 1985," he begins, "and it was to get the 48K source code into an editable and rebuildable state." Rupert then spent most of the remainder of 1985 working with a number of other programmers on the 128K additions such as the new sound chip and improved BASIC editor. One of his final tasks prior to the release of the machine was the onerous-sounding compatibility testing. "That was me, a joystick, a working 128K prototype, and a very large cardboard box of tapes," he grimaces. "And to be honest it burned the desire to play games right out of my system!"

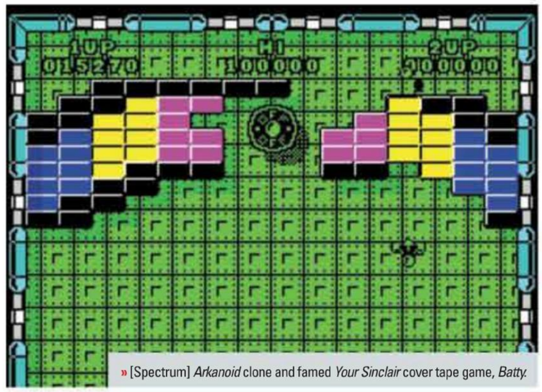
128K rising

The 128K was eventually launched in the UK early in 1986 and was similar in design to the 48K+, save for the obvious addition of what would become colloquially known as the 'toast rack' – actually, an external heat sink, and not recommended in any official capacity as a means of heating bread. Despite the extra processing power and vastly improved sound, however, the success of the previous model and a lack of support from developers and software houses meant that after an initial period, sales tailed off dramatically for the new computer. "People soon realised there weren't a huge amount of games using the extra memory," says Ian Richardson. "Plus we noticed the price of the 128K (£179) was not far off the Commodore 64, which had started to become cheaper."

With the Amstrad buyout of the Sinclair brand of computers impending, the games market continued unconcerned. It was now a million-pound industry ruled by large and business-like publishers such as Ocean, Elite Systems, Electric Dreams and US Gold, each churning out more and more product every year, much of it now licensed from other media, whether it be arcade machine, movie or personality. Such was the domination and user base of the Spectrum and the other 8-bit machines that vastly superior cartridge-based systems coming from Japan such as the Sega Master System and Nintendo Entertainment System failed to make much of a dent on the UK market.

With the new Amstrad Spectrum came a greater acceptance of the machine's main appeal. Rupert Goodwins made the transition across to the Brentwood-based company. "I was impressed with Amstrad's no-nonsense approach," he says, "and a lot of things that probably should have been done at Sinclair, they just went ahead and did them."

It was clear that Amstrad didn't care what its computers were used for, as long as they shifted units. To this end, the Sinclair Spectrum +2 and +3 included a built-in tape and disk drive respectively, something Sinclair Research had always appeared reluctant to provide. Rick Dickinson perhaps provides an explanation: "A lot of R&D at Sinclair went into peripheral hardware to support the games position, yet keeping everything as 'separates', and this was basically to keep the market cost down if somebody didn't want to go down that route." Nevertheless, the Amstrad machines extended the life of the Spectrum into the next decade despite



» [Spectrum] *Arkanoid* clone and famed *Your Sinclair* cover tape game, *Batty*.

> "The Spectrum saw many varied and experimental games, probably more than any other computer"
>
> PHILIP OLIVER ON THE GAME DEVELOPMENT RISKS REGULARLY TAKEN ON THE SPECTRUM

The Imagine connection

Despite its unfortunate demise, Imagine still produced several early classics for the Spectrum…

ARCADIA

Where else to begin but with the game that started it all for Imagine? Released in 1982, *Arcadia* was a lightning-paced shooter programmed by David Lawson that saw the player up against the evil Atarian empire as wave after wave of colourful enemy craft descended on the lone spaceship. The instant arcade appeal of *Arcadia* enticed many Spectrum owners and created a powerful springboard for Imagine.



JUMPING JACK

Could Albert and Stuart Ball's debut have been any simpler? It was based around a four-verse limerick, and each screen scaled would reveal two lines. Help Jack through each of the 20 screens and all four verses would be revealed. Hindering his progress were random holes and hazards that caused Jack to be temporarily stunned. *Jumping Jack* was easy to pick up, yet difficult to master.



ALCHEMIST

Famous for its attractive gold cassette edition, *Alchemist* saw the player in a battle against an evil warlock. Entering the warlock's castle, your wizard needed to collect four pieces of a magic scroll that would enable him to cast a deadly Spell of Destruction on his nemesis. *Alchemist* was a bright and enjoyable game that was streets ahead of most arcade adventures of the time.



STONKERS

Its title may be the subject of many a joke on certain Speccy forums, but this war game was one of three efforts for Imagine by John Gibson – the other two were *Molar Maul* and *Zzoom* – and was actually an intelligent combination of strategy and arcade action. As commander of your forces, the job was simple: eliminate the enemy while preserving your own ammo and supply chain.



THE SOFTWARE HOUSE



Rod Cousens CBE

Formerly of Quicksilva, Electric Dreams and Activision and now CEO of Codemasters

Retro Gamer: You were at Quicksilva at the time of the Spectrum's release. How do you recall the general feeling at this time?
Rod Cousens: The vibe in the computer industry at the time was something akin to a revolution, and the creative companies of the day – Psion, Bug-Byte, Silversoft, Salamander and us – all thought we could conquer the world. There was a tremendous camaraderie and it was a very exciting time, with young programmers working out of their bedrooms, constantly coming forward with ideas.

RG: Do you remember when you first saw a Spectrum?
RC: I first saw one in final form at a home computer fair at the Royal Horticultural Halls in London. The main talking points were the 48K of RAM and the rubber keys! I was aware of it beforehand, however, as we [Quicksilva] had a close relationship with Sinclair, and I recall visiting Alison Maguire in Cambridge to talk about the Spectrum's development.

RG: Electric Dreams was one of the bigger publishers on the Spectrum. How had the games market changed from the early days at Quicksilva?
RC: We were moving into support of formats such as the Commodore 64 with a broader global reach. We were also waiting for the next generation of machines and this, as with all generational shifts, resulted in rising development costs. Global publishers were entering the fray, and the first of these in Europe was Activision, and in targeting local content they funded Electric Dreams. It had become big business.

RG: Do you remember how Spectrum sales compared to the competing formats at the time and why the games were cheaper than on the rival systems?
RC: On a global scale, the Spectrum could not match the Commodore 64. It was predominantly a European market and was ahead of Amstrad and Commodore in many European territories. As to the pricing, the cost of development was lower on the Spectrum, the catalogue of Commodore 64 games was weighted to US games, and the royalty levels were higher.

RG: Why do you think the Spectrum was so popular and long-lasting, managing to stay in production for a decade?
RC: The design, the size and the games made it compelling at the time. And it was British. It was also a great medium of expression and was affordable.

RG: How do you think the Spectrum has influenced what the games market has become today?
RC: The current gaming market has its roots in that era and owes its existence to that time.

production of the +3 ceasing in 1990. With the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST now firmly established, it seemed obvious, however, that the end of the Spectrum was fast approaching.

A new decade

"By 1990, the world was changing," says Gary Bracey. "The 16-bits were now dominating, and it was clear the Spectrum was on the wane and only really viable for budget software. As far as Ocean was concerned, a significant factor was probably resources: if we made a game on the Spectrum then perhaps we couldn't make an Atari ST version due to the drain on manpower. And, of course, all the best programmers wanted to be involved with the latest formats."

Philip Oliver also felt the tide was fully turned by 1990: "We had decided at that point to switch to console games, first to the NES and Master System, then the Mega Drive. This was mainly because of their popularity in North America and our grander ambitions for our future games. The Spectrum had done incredibly well in the UK, but not so well elsewhere."

It's an oft-discussed subject, the perceived lack of support for the Spectrum in non-UK territories, yet perhaps not as clear cut as many people assume. "The United States was always a market that attracted Sinclair, if just for the sheer scale of its economy and the potential sales," recalls Rick Dickinson. "Yet despite opening a sales office in Boston, the Spectrum was never as successful there as we hoped."

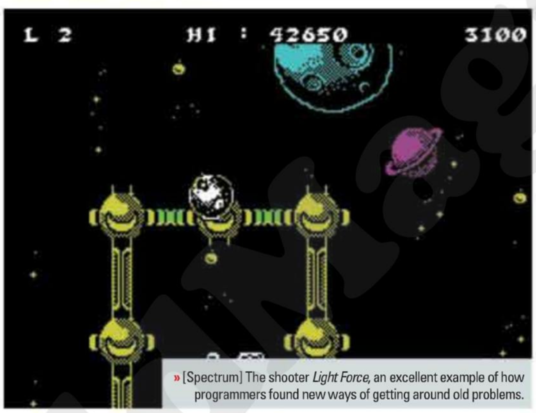
A deal had already been struck with US company Timex for distribution of the ZX81, and a similar agreement was negotiated for the Spectrum. Timex re-engineered the computer, including an effort to make the external appearance more 'American', but it ultimately faced exceptionally tough competition from local manufacturers, specifically Commodore. However, in Europe, the story was different, with countries such as the Netherlands, Spain and Germany all enjoying varying degrees of Spectrum love thanks to both Sinclair Research and Amstrad. Nonetheless, with competition from not only the aforementioned cartridge-based consoles but also the 16-bit computers, it's incredible that the Spectrum could still maintain a market share at all by this time. So what was the key to its success?

The secret to its success

"Simplicity," states Rupert Goodwins with unassuming candour. "It was simple and it was cheap. And because it was cheap, it sold heavily, and with lots of users there was a big market and a lot of wannabe programmers all teaching themselves how to write games. And because it was simple, it didn't take them long ▶



» [Spectrum] There were some excellent arcade conversions on the Spectrum like Elite's *Bomb Jack*.



» [Spectrum] The shooter *Light Force*, an excellent example of how programmers found new ways of getting around old problems.





» [Spectrum] Raffaele Cecco programmed many famous and colourful games such as *Exolon*.

» [Spectrum] The Speccy had its share of clunkers like *Highlander*.

From the forum

Readers' remember the ZX Spectrum

Hitman_Halstep
My first experience was my brother getting one for Christmas. It was a complete eye-opener going from a *Pong* machine to watching *Manic Miner*, *Monty* or *Pitman Seven* running.

Sputryk
Saving to buy the 48+ for Christmas and buying issue 20 (*Red Moon*) of *Crash* in preparation. *Monty On The Run* was reviewed and it became my first game purchase and favourite platformer. Brilliant Christmas! Have managed to complete the game over the years, though not often as it is evil.

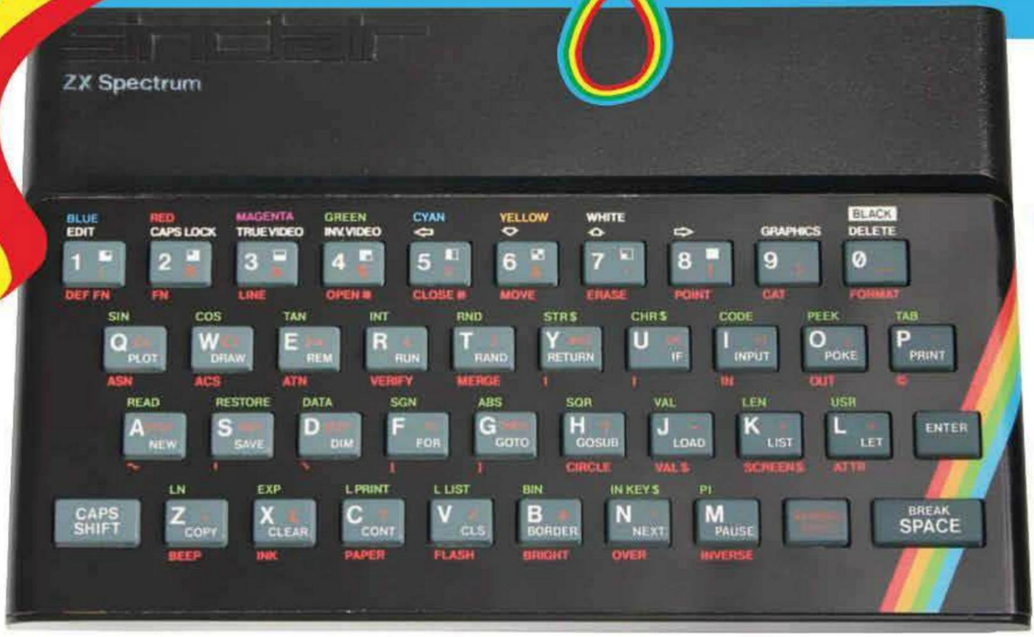
psj3809
I had heard about computers but only saw them in catalogues or on display in Dixons. I went round my best friend's after Christmas one day and saw he had a 16K Spectrum and loved it. I was amazed you could just keep swapping in different tapes to load in so many different games!

sirclive1
Christmas Day 1984 was the most amazing day ever. I'd had my Spectrum for a year but had really been scraping around for games, typing in listings from magazines, reading *Crash* and imagining how they all played, borrowing games off mates and having a great time but not owning many games as money was tight. I had only written 'Spectrum games' on my Christmas list, but got *The Lords Of Midnight*, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, the *Automania/Pyjamarama* double pack, *Booty* and *Ghostbusters*, and I don't think I moved off the Speccy all day apart from a quick break to eat my Christmas dinner! I still have all those games on a separate shelf at home. Great times.

greenberet79
My childhood = my Spectrum. Back then, games were a thing of mystery and exploration!

deadpan666
Being a bit late to the Speccy scene, I bought a lot of games pretty cheap and the magazines bumped up my collection pretty quickly. I managed to persuade four of my mates and my brother to all have a game of *Chaos* one day, and playing it as was intended with lots of real-life players was a gaming memory that will be with me always! I think it ended with loads of Gooey Blobs and Magic Fires pretty much consuming everything on the screen…

Fawltykog
Ahh, the sweet smell of burning as the mains power pack for my Speccy overheated on a blazing hot summer day in 1984. Yep, that's my most remembered memory of the wondrous ZX Spectrum… Oh, and *Sabre Wulf*, *Atic Atac*, *Manic Miner*, *Jet Set Willy*, ad nauseam.



"The Spectrum demystified computing"

SINCLAIR RESEARCH AND AMSTRAD'S RUPERT GOODWINS

THE PROGRAMMER



Jim Bagley

Programmer of Midnight Resistance, Cabal and Hudson Hawk for Ocean Software – and currently working on a brand new Spectrum game!

Retro Gamer: You programmed some of the most colourful games to grace the Spectrum. What tricks did you use to get around its signature graphical issues such as attribute clash?
Jim Bagley: Well, take *Midnight Resistance*, for example. In order to get around the colour clash, you needed to scroll the screen in characters, 8x8 pixels. I also drew some of the sprites with attributes for maximum colour effects, like the explosions and the big bosses. It was a balancing act as well squeezing in what we could of the arcade game by removing some of the background characters that were not too different from others so we could get away with using the same characters over again! It was a juggling act of doing this without ruining the look of the game.

RG: What were the advantages and drawbacks to programming on the Spectrum compared to other computers of the time?
JB: I loved programming on the Spectrum. So what if it didn't have hardware scrolling, sprites or a SID chip? It only made us better coders, I think, as we had to think more into what and how we would convert something. It was a challenge.

RG: Which model of Spectrum do you have a particular affinity with?
JB: Definitely the original 48K. It's a great little machine and also was my entrance into the games industry. Its role has been a great milestone in history!

RG: What do you think made the Spectrum so popular, both with programmers and gamers?
JB: Simple: you could play games in your own home without forking out a fortune at the arcades. And you could do so much more if you could program, or even just type in listings from magazines.

RG: How would you explain the system's longevity, with a commercial life well into the 16-bit era and outliving many competitors?
JB: Mainly because so many people have wonderful childhood memories of playing games on it and cherish those good times. It's like a really good friend; it gave you great times and was always ready to make you happy.

to learn the ropes." Rick Dickinson adds: "I think people sensed that it could be popular and they could also see the potential for high-volume sales and profits. The low cost also made it accessible to younger people, and maybe there's just something about the Spectrum that had some kind of desirability edge over its rivals."

Ocean's Gary Bracey has similar thoughts: "The price was a great entry-level ticket for what was deemed as such a cutting-edge piece of technology, and although all the kids just wanted to play games on it, they managed to convince their parents that it was absolutely necessary for schoolwork! I think the publicity element was crucial as well. Sir Clive Sinclair was, in fact, a terrific publicist, and everyone bought into the whole 'British inventor' thing – and quite rightly too!"

Yet despite its success, the wonder that was the ZX Spectrum was not without its faults. Coming from a BBC and Amstrad CPC 664 background, the Oliver twins were late to the party. "Actually, we thought we'd missed the party completely," laughs Philip Oliver, "when, in fact, our style of mass-market, family-orientated games was just what the Spectrum audience wanted. And by 1987, there were a lot of people with Spectrums, with an estimated 3 million in the UK alone." This was clearly a major advantage in programming for the Spectrum – but what were the disadvantages?

The Ocean connection

Ocean produced a few clunkers, yet many, many quality games…

ARMAGEDDON

One of Ocean's first releases following its name change from Spectrum Games Ltd, *Armageddon* followed in an already fine 8-bit tradition of shamelessly copying famous arcade games of the time and releasing them under a new name. The inspiration on this occasion was Atari's trackball classic *Missile Command*, and *Armageddon* was a decent clone released in 1983 and programmed by Adrian Sherwin. Overlook the brazen lack of originality and it's a great version.

HUNCHBACK

Based on a relatively obscure Century Electronics coin-op, *Hunchback* was another early Ocean game, the sequel to which featured in the infamous *Commercial Breaks* documentary. As Quasimodo, the player's task was to rescue Esmeralda, who had been imprisoned within a heavily fortified castle stronghold. *Hunchback* wasn't the most complex of games – there were only three controls: left, right and jump – yet this lack of sophistication and its colourful graphics made it a big hit.

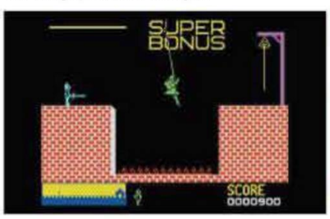
DALEY THOMPSON'S DECATHLON

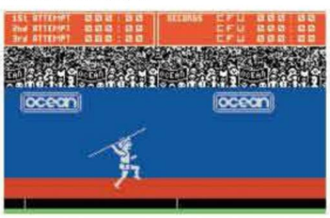
The most famous of the *Track & Field* clones that peppered the Spectrum in the mid-Eighties, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* featured the man himself – looking a little… uh… pale – charging his way through ten varied events. Programmed by Ocean veterans Paul Owens and Christian Urquhart, it became infamous as the game that ruined thousands of Spectrum keyboard membranes, making a decent joystick a necessary investment, not least for multiplayer.

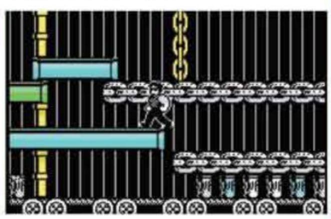
COBRA

Programmed by the talented Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith (*Green Beret*, *Hypersports*), *Cobra* was a superb game based on a rather naff movie – a welcome reverse for Spectrum owners going by the usual standard of movie-licensed games. The game was immensely playable and boasted some beautifully smooth scrolling that kept it running at a furious pace. Add a dash of Smith's dark humour and some catchy tunes by Martin Galway and you have one of Ocean's finest achievements.









"The Spectrum was fairly limited in terms of speed, and the colour attributes were definitely… challenging," continues Philip, carefully. "But, in a way, hardware limitations can be a good thing as you have to be inventive and come up with clever techniques to get around them. The fact there was a good-resolution pixel-based screen meant you could get some great variety." The resolution of the Spectrum display was also a boon to graphic artists, as Ocean's Mark Jones recalls: "You could get great detail into the smallest of sprites and, as long as you knew how to work around the two colours per 8x8 block restrictions, it was possible to get a decent-looking loading screen done almost within one day."

Final thoughts

There are three elements to the Spectrum success story. First, the opening and prime period of its life; then the way this life was extended beyond what could be reasonably expected given the advances of computer technology; and finally, the Spectrum scene today, with many new games still being released every year. Its longevity in itself is quite remarkable.

"That's something of a mystery," reflects Rick Dickinson. "In the beginning I think it was a combination of the many things happening in Britain at the time, and the Spectrum just hit the right spot, at the right price at the right time. There must be something pure and special about it that people just can't leave alone today."

To Rupert Goodwins, the influence of the Spectrum on the games market today cannot be overstated. "It demystified computers and gaming," he says, "and if you were a smart kid with time on your hands you could really understand the Spectrum, right down to almost transistor level. And then, by magic, you can make money by flinging some colourful bits around the screen. Boom. You've got an instant industry."

Gary Bracey remembers the generational differences of the time. "It was the dawn of a new era, and at the time everybody was embracing this amazing technology that hadn't even been conceived when their parents were at the same age."

And from a retail point of view, Ian Richardson is crystal clear on the reason for the Spectrum's success: "The biggest advantage the Speccy had was the wide range of software available for it and that the price points on most games were so affordable. It obviously had very good support from publishers."

Spectrum forever

Richard Wilcox of Elite Systems acknowledges the influence of the Spectrum today. "There were so many different types of people making games for the Spectrum," he says, "and new gaming genres arrived on an almost weekly basis. Many of them were really embryonic and wouldn't reach fruition until many years later on more powerful machines. But just about all the staples of gameplay seen today were on the Spectrum in some form or other."

Philip Oliver agrees: "The success of our *Dizzy* games was down to the success of the Spectrum. That success has led us to create our own games studio, which today employs over 200 creative and talented developers – many of whom were inspired to join the games industry from playing games on the Spectrum in their youth."

But perhaps the biggest compliment to Sinclair and the ZX Spectrum is the way it has influenced us all, from the parents who stood wide-eyed, like Steve Wilcox in his computer shop back in 1983, as their offspring sat glued to the latest game, to those who programmed, played and wrote about the games.

"There are two kinds of people in life," muses Richard Wilcox. "Those who owned a Sinclair Spectrum and those who didn't. If you are one of the former then you've probably spent the last 30 years always feeling slightly ahead of the curve when it comes to gaming, and all because the Spectrum was the most amazing test bed for new ideas."

We heartily agree, Richard. Here's to the next 30.

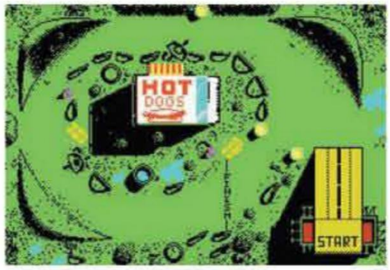
Special thanks to Martyn Carroll and all our interviewees for their time.

The Codemasters connection

Absolutely brilliant! Well, not always, but it did produce many excellent games at rock-bottom prices…

BMX SIMULATOR

Written by Tim Miller from Richard Darling's C64 original and with graphics by Codemasters regular Jim Wilson, *BMX Simulator* was the publisher's first foray into Spectrum software in 1987. It was a simple game, capitalising on a BMX craze that had passed, yet nonetheless contained clear graphics and a nifty two-player option. The famous Codemasters hyperbole was already featuring on the inlay: "AMAZING REALISM!"



SUPER ROBIN HOOD

Despite decidedly lukewarm reviews at the time – *Sinclair User* rather unhelpfully called the game "useless", while *Crash* bemoaned its lack of originality – *Super Robin Hood* was a good seller thanks to some playable platform and shooting action. The high standard of presentation was no doubt a factor, as was the fact that Codemasters was offering excellent value for money with a price tag of just £1.99.



DIZZY

Released in 1987, the adventures of the little ovoid quickly became a mega-hit for Codemasters and the start of a successful career for its authors, Philip and Andrew Oliver. Somersaulting around and collecting the ingredients for a potion to kill an evil wizard was the aim of the game, and Codies surpassed itself with its back-cover exuberance: "A brilliant game by brilliant programmers for brilliant games players!"



ROCK STAR ATE MY HAMSTER

As part of the Codemasters Gold sub-label, *Rock Star Ate My Hamster* was a rock star management simulator, to use Codemasters' own vernacular, that gained a cult following thanks to its caricatures of then-current pop stars such as Morrissey and David Bowie. It was, at heart, not the most exciting of the Codemasters range, although its penchant for amusing tragedies, à la *Spinal Tap*, often raised a smile.



THE FAN

Martijn van Der Heide

Owner, World of Spectrum

Retro Gamer: What were your early memories of the Spectrum?

Martijn Van Der Heide: It really feels like yesterday! One of my friends got a Spectrum for his birthday in 1984 and we all gathered around while he unpacked it and loaded up the *Horizons* tape. We saw it as nothing short of a miracle: colours, sound and lower-case characters! A very memorable day.

RG: What do you think made the computer so popular with the public?

MVDH: I believe the prospect of fortune is what struck us most; reading about programmers like Matthew Smith driving around in posh cars while writing successful games showed something of remarkable promise to us. And the games themselves were very varied; everything was open and all manner of genres were explored. Even games that failed could spawn other games of a similar ilk.

RG: You're obviously a huge fan. What do you love most about the computer and which model in particular?

MVDH: I started with the 16K version, but the 48K rubber-key Spectrum is where all my best memories are from. What I loved was the means to create your own software without hassle. I never had an assembler until I started World of Spectrum, so I learned about it through hex-editing memory – after some efforts in BASIC, of course. Another aspect was to learn more about the hardware. How it all worked was a magnificent learning episode and prompted me to get a college education in computer science.

RG: Why do you think the Spectrum wasn't so popular outside the UK?

MVDH: Actually, I don't buy into that. For instance, the Spectrum was well supported in my country, Holland, until at least 1989. Software was available in shops, as were the magazines such as *Your Sinclair*. Any perceived lack of popularity over the C64 I regard as American revisionism!

RG: How would you explain the Spectrum's longevity?

MVDH: I'm not really sure, to be honest! Perhaps the interest in Eastern Europe is responsible, although the adventure and PD scene also kept it going for a number of years. Nowadays, everything retro is hot; the Spectrum might have an advantage in that the proper tools to develop new software are freely available.

RG: How did you feel at the end of the Spectrum's commercial life?

MVDH: I felt really sorry to see the Speccy go when its commercial span ended and the magazines closed their doors. At the time I was a student and still used Tasword Two on the Spectrum daily…

RG: But of course it wasn't the end…

MVDH: For a moment I thought it was. But then I'd access newsgroups and found comp.sys.sinclair. That was the moment when I knew I had to keep the flag waving!

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS

SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS



INFO

- **SYSTEM:** SNES
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A



Like many Super Nintendo games, Capcom's *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* had a *Super* prefix attached to it, but this was no mere superlative for the sake of it. Mega Drive owners had been suitably impressed by the conversion of the hit *Ghost 'N Goblins* sequel, but Capcom's decision to make a brand new game for the Super Nintendo resulted in a release that was arguably better than the original arcade game, thanks to far better level design, stunning boss encounters and brilliantly atmospheric music. In short, it was a revelation, and an early example of just how powerful Nintendo's 16-bit console actually was.

Once again taking on the role of Sir Arthur, *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* didn't feature many key differences to past games in the series, but the inclusion of the new double-jump was a major one that drastically changed your approach to Capcom's new game. The new double-jump made Sir Arthur a lot more manoeuvrable, which came in very handy for negotiating the tricky landscapes, but it came at a price, as he could no longer fire above or below him. This in turn ramped up the already high difficulty of the series, but also meant that *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* felt more like a traditional platformer, rather than the run-and-gun approach that Ghouls 'N Ghosts took.

Aesthetically, *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was completely stunning, with bold, brilliantly animated sprites, huge bosses and intricately designed stages that would often move and alter as Arthur ran through them. This was most noticeable on the first level, where graveyards would erupt from the ground, huge pillars of earth would raise skywards, and Mode 7 spores would expand, attempting to catch Arthur out as they erupted. The clever tricks continued on later stages, with swirling blizzards and pitching seas all getting in the way of Arthur's progress. The dynamic visuals and fabulous sprite design were further enhanced by a suitably ghoulish soundtrack that perfectly captured the on-screen action.

Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts wasn't without its drawbacks though, with the aforementioned difficulty curve being a huge issue for some frustrated players. This was further compounded by Capcom's frankly evil decision to force you to run through the game a second time (with an appallingly rubbish weapon) in order to truly finish it. And yet *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* continues to draw us back for more games. It looks glorious, has an excellent pace to it and remains challenging, but is never unfair. Despite beginning life on the Super Nintendo, various other systems, including the Saturn, PlayStation and Game Boy Advance received ports, meaning it shouldn't be too hard to track down. We'd go with the SNES one though, as it's the original and still the best.

» [SNES] *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* get difficult really quickly. We swore a lot on this level.



» [SNES] It's worth seeking out green armour, as it upgrades your current weapon.



» [SNES] He looks tough, but this first boss is actually pretty easy to defeat.



BOSS RUSH

Some of the armour-smashing foes you'll encounter...



GIANT VULTURE

He looks fearsome, but this guy is easy to beat. Watch out for his extendable neck and the eggs he spits at you.



PLATED BARNACLE

This guy is another boss that offers no real challenge. Just be aware of the rocket-like crustaceans that he randomly fires.



PULSATING WORM

There are some nice Mode 7 effects used here, but he's still puts up very little fight. Just keep hammering him till he blows up.



HYDRA

Three heads are better than one and they're all hungry. Watch out for its fire and the creatures it spits at you.



ICE DEMON

Avoid its icy demon breath and dangerous claws and you'll be fine. Keep your distance and keep firing at him.



LUCIFER

This guy can be a real pain to beat. Watch out for the dual combination of belly fire and eye lasers that he uses.



SARDIUS

A fairly pish boss if we're honest. Ride the platforms he spits out and aim for his head. An easy end to a tough game.

THE MAKING OF CYBERNOID THE FIGHTING MACHINE

"If something is worth doing, it's worth overdoing," says Raffaele Cecco when describing the design philosophy of Cybernoid, and there was certainly a feeling of throwing the kitchen sink at the game. Luckily, as Raffaele recalls in an interview with David Crookes, it was all good, clean fun



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** HEWSON CONSULTANTS
» **DEVELOPER:** RAFFAELE CECCO
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, NES, AMIGA
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

Raffaele Cecco has proud parents. And why wouldn't he? He has produced a string of top-rated games that are still being talked and written about today, as evidenced by this article. So little wonder they are so proud of his achievements – those halcyon days when he produced *Equinox, Cybernoid, Exolon, Stormlord* and *First Samurai* in rapid succession – that they have kept little mementos. "I think they've still got old copies of *Cybernoid* and all sorts of things knocking about at home," he tells us.

Such enthusiasm would surely have been preceded by apprehension, however, as for Raffaele, who was halfway through his A-levels when he quit college to work for Mikro-Gen, where he would produce *Equinox*, it could easily have gone wrong. But it soon became evident that he had the talent to make an impact on videogaming and, by the time he had moved to Hewson Consultants to work on *Cybernoid*, he was confident and his parents were starting to relax.

With *Cybernoid*, Raffaele was left alone to do what he felt was best, and that free rein meant drawing up a list of things to include. He sat down with his boss, Anthony Hewson, and the pair decided that it would be a good idea to take influence from *Exolon*. *Crash* had given that game 87%, so it was deemed to be a good platform on which to build. In particular, the mag's reviewer said Mikro-Gen had gone back to its old 'lots of colour' policy, and that was one of the first things on the list for *Cybernoid*.

"*Exolon* was a major influence on *Cybernoid*, I admit," says Raffaele. "In fact, it was a kind of cross between *Exolon* and a puzzler that I'd converted from the coin-op version to the ZX Spectrum for Probe. I wanted *Cybernoid* to have lots of arcade shooter elements but also bring in a firm strand of puzzles, and that's the premise on which I started the game."

As well as drawing influence from the games on which he directly worked, Raffaele played around. Grabbing a joystick and firing up a host of games, he devoured whatever he could, and he also spent time in the arcades. At the time, there were many titles with multiple-weapon systems, from *Zynaps* to *Side Arms*, each offering add-on firepower. Wanting to tap into this trend, Raffaele introduced a similar system for *Cybernoid*, only he desired distinct weapons that could be chosen using key presses, each one having a different graphic outcome on the screen. He didn't just want the usual rear and side guns; he wanted a CyberMace, which swirled around, and guns that would fire backwards. *Cybernoid* was simply packed with weapons, and it became a joy to discover them all, whether it was a bomb, defence shield, impact mine or seeker, among a host of others.

"The CyberMace was the best with its sparkling trail," says Raffaele, fondly. "But all of the weapons were inspired by add-ons that I was starting to see in the arcades. The tricky part was how to

select them. At first I thought about using a joystick, but in the end this was too cumbersome. It interrupted the flow of the game, which was very fast, so I went for key presses. It made life easier."

Of all the weapons, the CyberMace was the easiest and yet most effective to produce, taking around 20 minutes to create. Without getting too technical, Raffaele produced a circular pattern that was a table of X and Y offsets relative to the main ship's position. This was stored in the computer's memory. When the trail was added, it produced a rather cool effect as the weapon circled the player.

But not everything was as straightforward. "*Cybernoid* took me about nine months to develop overall," Raffaele says. "And as usual, most of the issues were related to speed and memory constraints. There was a lot going on with lots of moving graphics. If the game slowed down, it would ruin the pace, so the problem of speed and memory was solved by producing efficient data structures for the screen definitions, and I spent a lot of time optimising for the speed issues until they were sorted."

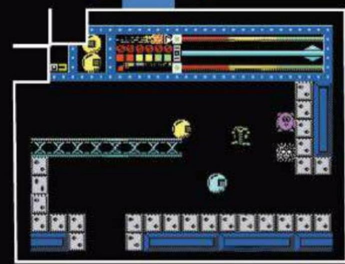
The sprites moved at a speedy 25 frames per second in the end. This was assisted by allowing moving sprites to adopt the background colour. If one sprite moved over another, the game was so fast that it barely lasted any time at all and so any attribute flicker was kept to an absolute minimum. "The experience of putting *Cybernoid* together taught me a lot," Raffaele recalls. "I had to perfect the collisions and the textures, and it came together well."

The whole screen was a kaleidoscope of colour and action. Explosions would go off left, right and centre, and the player was right in the thick of the action, smashing down on keys to activate various weapons and doing all they could to survive, not to mention try to blast enemies into kingdom come.

> "The whole screen was a kaleidoscope of colour and action, with explosions going off left, right and centre"



» [CPC] Making great use of the CyberMace to knock out foes while ploughing through some tough screens.



CECCO HIGHLIGHTS

EQUINOX (PICTURED)
YEAR: 1986
As Raff's first major project, this brightly coloured masterpiece was an early glimpse of the design that would be a hallmark of his games, bringing together shooting and adventure in a puzzling blend that perforated the eyes.

EXOLON
YEAR: 1987
There was astonishment at the level of detail that *Exolon* threw up, and that made this a screen-packed jam of addictive and tough problems that ensured relaxation was the last thing on the player's mind.

STORMLORD
YEAR: 1989
Stunning and sexy, *Stormlord* took a third *Crash* Smash with a fast and fluid game that was deep, involved and innovative. It mixed audacious audio with gorgeous graphics and took the Spectrum to its limits.

DELIVERANCE: STORMLORD II
YEAR: 1990
Headache-inducing due to its sheer intensity, *Deliverance* built on its predecessor. As provocative as the first game and just as difficult, it shook graphical foundations and had players grinding their teeth.

FIRST SAMURAI
YEAR: 1991
First Samurai was as near a rival to *The Last Ninja* as you'd get, and it was a feat of endurance like no other. After playing this to the end, you'd feel a real sense of accomplishment.

SWEET MUSIC

WHEN DAVE ROGERS created the original music for *Cybernoid* and other Hewson titles, his method was rather simple: he wrote his sounds using an Amstrad 464 and a guitar. And that was it. There was no MIDI and no keyboards. He used that method for all the platforms on which he produced music, utilising sound drivers for the Spectrum 128, Spectrum 48 and Atari ST that played Amstrad-generated data.

"I used to play around with the basic ideas for the music on guitar, then type the notes and durations into an editing program that I'd written in Amstrad BASIC," he explains. "I'd then spend quite ridiculous amounts of time messing about with the arrangement, harmonies, envelopes and so on. A compiler would compress it all into a data block for use by the sound driver in the game. The driver was the only part that I wrote in machine code, because obviously it had to be very fast. Everything else was written in BASIC, which, as we all know, is a language that is never, ever used by proper games programmers! But I preferred it."

And if you fancy strumming along to *Cybernoid* on your own guitar, the original chords for the Amstrad version are as follows. The Spectrum version is two semitones lower, so it starts in F minor instead of G minor.

(Gm, Dm, Bb, C) x4
(Gm, D/F#bass, Gm, D/A, Bb, F, C) x2
(Abmaj7, Bbsus4, Bmaj7, C#2)
(Fm, Cm, Ab, Bb) x2
(Gm, Dm, Bb, C) x2

And into this mix was an infusion of humour, typified by many British developers of the time. After all, this was all about pirates plundering the Massive Federation Intergalactic storage depots that, abbreviated, gave you MFI. When it came to cheat codes, if the player redefined the keys as YXES ('sexy' backwards), it was possible to get infinite lives. (For *Cybernoid II*, the keys needed redefining as ORGY.) This cheat was essential, given the great difficulty of the game.

Although *Exolon* was space-themed – thankfully, in space, no one could hear your anguished, frustrated screams – the fact that *Cybernoid* was also a space shoot-'em-up played only a small part in Raffaele's thinking. "The space theme was just incidental really," he says by way of explanation. The main thing was being innovative and trying to break new ground, and the graphics were a major part of that in an era where the shots on the back of a box or in a magazine counted for a lot. "Today I think a lot of games have the same kinds of effect in them, and I think for the untrained eye now it's difficult for someone to spot whether a technique is something revolutionary or not, because some user games just look so good," he explains.

For the graphics, Raffaele stuck to what he knew: "The graphics were drawn on a custom graphics editor I'd used at Mikro-Gen. It ran on a Spectrum and it uploaded to the development computer. The development machine was an IBM PC based on the CP/M operating system, and it linked to the Spectrum via the serial port. So I wrote the program on that and downloaded it to the Spectrum for testing."



» [CPC] Some parts were extremely difficult. Getting through this little puzzle required serious hand-eye co-ordination.

> "I was thrilled with the reviews. They were better than I expected them to be and there were so many front covers"

The PC was used for its fast assembler and editor. It also included a monitor, which examined the Spectrum's memory as it ran so that Raffaele could see what was taking up the resources. And while he ensured as much of the system was freed up for graphics as possible, he also had another trick up his sleeve: audio.

Dave Rogers was drafted in by Hewson to produce the *Cybernoid* music, and he did such a wonderful job of it that he was also asked to create the soundtrack for *Stormlord*. Dave was an experienced videogame developer, having worked on *Flatman* and *Money Grabber* for the ZX81. He'd also worked with Hewson on other major projects, starting with *Zynaps* in 1987. He never actually met any of the company's programmers, although he was once visited by Andrew Hewson.

For *Cybernoid*, he eked out a magnificent three-channel slice of audio for the 128K machine. He worked from home, using videotapes of *Cybernoid* to see how he could work with the sound. He would then post back the drivers and music. Working without interference, he was able to produce the sounds he wanted.

"The ambience I was after was a sort of relentless or non-stop charging ahead feel," he tells us. "To emphasise this, I filled one of the sound channels with notes that were relentlessly unvarying in their timing but randomised in pitch, though still on musical intervals. The randomness also made the music slightly different each time it was played.

"I always bore in mind that game music is heard over and over again, so I tried to include things that might keep the interest going, like the randomisation and lots of chord changes. But even so, I don't think the *Cybernoid* music should have been left running all the way through the game like it was. I wish Raffaele had included an option to turn it off



» [CPC] A brief respite during an absolutely relentless game packed with explosions and tricky situations.



and just leave the sound effects, which he did in *Cybernoid II*."

Dave's music was used on the Spectrum and Atari ST versions of the game, with a Commodore 64 port containing a new theme by Dutch composer Jeroen Tel. "The C64 version was great," recalls Raffaele. "And that music…"

And yet it is the graphics for which *Cybernoid* sticks in the mind, even though it trampled familiar territory. "Truth be told, my graphics abilities were limited, so I kept to a familiar style that I was comfortable with, hence it looked similar to *Exolon*," he continues.

But there was no getting away from that difficulty. "A three-hit energy bar would have made it less harsh and annoying," admits Raffaele, recoiling at the memory of the easy deaths that made *Cybernoid* so difficult – five lives was not really enough to cope with all of the pirates and defences that a player had to encounter in a typical play. And yet, when the game was finally released, it was to wonderful reviews. "I was absolutely thrilled with the reviews. They were better than I expected them to be and there were so many front covers too," he says.

The *Cybernoid* story doesn't stop there. A sequel, produced in 1988 and called *Cybernoid II: The Revenge*, gave the player more of the same, albeit with better graphics and some gameplay tweaks, yet it still reviewed well. But it was the original that was picked for a revival on the Wii's Virtual Console, the C64 version given a dust off for a new generation of players to discover and enjoy.

So is Raffaele proud of becoming a household name among gamers? "Frankly, I don't think anyone outside of the games industry and hardcore gamers are that interested," he says, believing that videogames are the stars. And in this case, that was certainly true.



» [C64] *Cybernoid's* intense blasting and pixel perfect precision really helps it to stand out.

» [NES] *Cybernoid* even made it to Nintendo's NES. Style wise it's very similar to the C64 version.





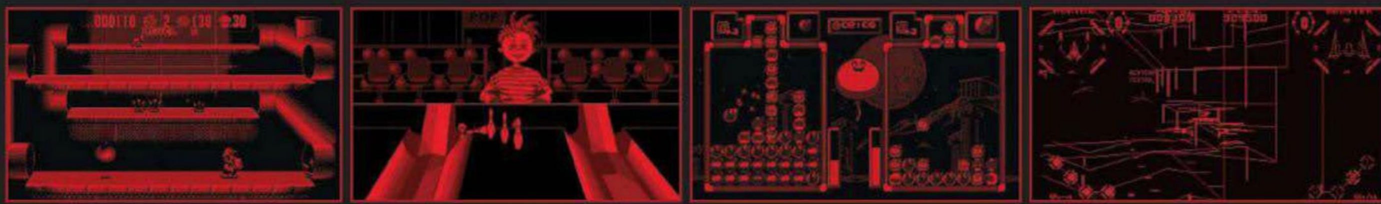
» [Spectrum] The start screen on the Spectrum, and about as safe as you can get.




12
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MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE





With the 3DS turning a year old recently, we decided that there was no better time to reflect on the gaming catalogue of its ill-fated 3D precursor, the Virtual Boy. We take a look at each of the 22 games officially released for one of the biggest flops in Nintendo's history to see if it offered anything over dull headaches, redness and import tax





GALACTIC PINBALL

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Intelligent Systems





POPULAR WITH THE Virtual Boy fraternity, *Galactic Pinball* is widely regarded as one of the best showcases for the console's 3D technology. You get four fairly simple tables to play, and all are dressed in a similar space theme. The visuals and presentation of the game are good, with tables revealing bonus games and animations, but it's worth pointing out that you actually play using a puck rather than a ball. The controls are sensibly mapped, with you actuating the flippers using the shoulder buttons; the gameplay is slick and fast; and you can even nudge the tables. Our biggest grumble, though, is that it is a bit light on modes and options. There's no two-player head-to-head either.

Virtual Trivia: Galactic Pinball *was a launch title for the Virtual Boy, and before release was wheeled out at exhibitions to showcase the console's 3D technology.*

MARIO CLASH

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Nintendo R&D1



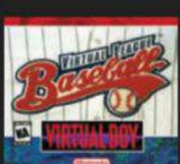


LITTLE GETS TAMPERED with in this 3D re-imagining of the original *Mario Bros*. The biggest change occurs to the playing field, which gets split between a foreground and background connected by pipes that Mario and his enemies can pass through. As in the original, your aim is to help Mario exterminate all the enemies on each stage, and this is done by stomping Koopas and using their shells. Basic enemies can be killed with a single shell, while later ones, such as Spinies, require a few hits and must be stunned side-on, and so require Mario to lob shells across the playing field. With nice graphics and animation and some good use of 3D, *Mario Clash* is one of the better Virtual Boy titles.

Virtual Trivia: Mario Clash *was originally planned to be a pack-in game for the Virtual Boy in the US, but in the end Nintendo selected* Mario's Tennis.

VIRTUAL LEAGUE BASEBALL (AKA VIRTUAL PRO YAKYU '95)

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Kemco





CONSIDERING THAT BASEBALL is popular in both Japan and the US, and that the Virtual Boy was only released in these territories, it makes sense that a baseball game was created for the machine. Apart from a nicely detailed batting/pitching screen, though, everything else about *Virtual League Baseball* looks and feels untidy. Player animations aren't smooth, and there's a lack of varied game modes too. The biggest issue is when the ball is struck and the view changes to show the whole stadium. If your team is fielding, you control some very tiny players that oddly move in unison and pull themselves out of position. Not ideal behaviour if you're trying to throw a ball between them.

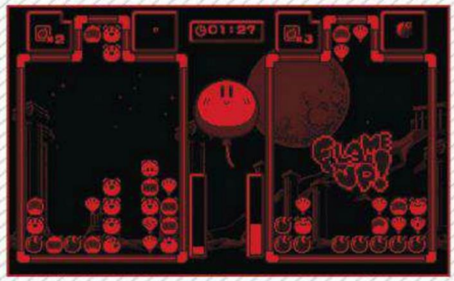
Virtual Trivia: *While the US version goes for realism, the Japanese edition features big-headed cartoon players.*

PANIC BOMBER (AKA TOBIDASE! PANIBOMB)

Year Released: 1996 **Developer:** Nintendo R&D3



THOUGH WE SUSPECT most Virtual Boy owners would have preferred a more traditional *Bomberman* game, *Panic Bomber* is actually a rather neat tile-matching puzzle game, offering a slight twist on the traditional formula. Matching three tiles of a similar type places a bomb in your row and causes a meter to get partially filled. Once full, a lit bomb is then dropped into the game, which can be used to detonate the explosives, in turn clearing space and pushing tiles over to your opponent. The 3D is nicely applied and used to create visual pop between the playing field, sprites and background. There are a total of 11 computer opponents to face, with progress retrievable using passwords.



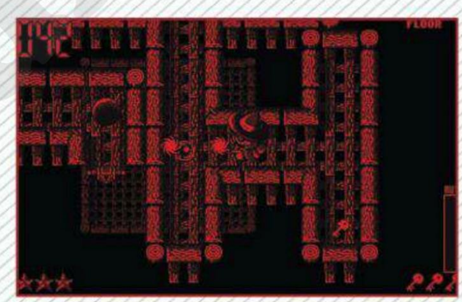
Virtual Trivia: Panic Bomber *first appeared on the TurboGrafx-16 and was also ported to the Super Famicom.*

JACK BROS (AKA JACK BROS NO MEIRO DE HIHO)

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Atlus



JACK BROS IS a cutesy top-down action title that has players locating keys in a series of deadly mazes patrolled by monsters. The 3D aspect comes from the levels being stacked on top of one another, with the next stage visible beneath the one you're standing on. There are three characters to choose from, all based on well-known Jacks – Jack Frost, Jack Skelton (Jack the Ripper in Japan) and Jack Lantern – and each has their own unique weapon and traits. With just six stages, though, *Jack Bros* is short and the game is fairly by the numbers. And while there are some very loose puzzle elements on later stages, what's here really only amounts to a few hours of gameplay.



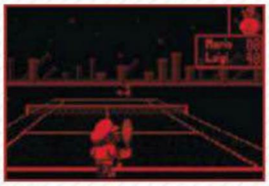
Virtual Trivia: Jack Bros *is the first of Atlus's long-running* Megami Tensei *series to be released outside Japan.*

MARIO'S TENNIS

Year Released: 1995
Developer: Nintendo R&D1



■ A LAUNCH GAME for the Virtual Boy in Japan and a pack-in with US systems, *Mario's Tennis* marks the first entry in the *Mario Tennis* series, which has become a mainstay on Nintendo systems. Featuring practically the same character roster as *Super Mario Kart*, only with no Bowser, each familiar character has their own skills and attributes, and this is boosted by a nice selection of shots. Choices of play include single match or tournament mode, both of which can be played solo or in doubles, and matches are played over one or three sets. Showcasing the impressive sense of depth that the Virtual Boy's 3D display technology could generate, *Mario's Tennis* is regarded as one of the better titles at demonstrating the power and potential of the machine.



RED ALARM

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** T&E Soft



■ OFTEN DESCRIBED AS the Virtual Boy's *Star Fox, Red Alarm* is a 3D shooter that sees players piloting a 3D spaceship through five stages to destroy a malevolent computer. Its wireframe visuals are a blessing and a curse, though, recalling vector classics but looking like an angry nest of red ants when the action gets too cluttered. *Red Alarm* is atmospheric, however, and with intuitive controls, a neat targeting system and interactive replays is fairly polished too. But like the majority of VB games, it suffers from being incredibly short. It's certainly the best shooter on the system, though.

Virtual Trivia: Electronic Gaming Monthly *awarded* Red Alarm *best Virtual Boy game of 1995.*



VERTICAL FORCE

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Hudson Soft



■ *VERTICAL FORCE*'S GIMMICK is that its action is split between two different vertical scrolling layers, which your ship can switch between at any point. It's an interesting concept that is used for maximising kills, evading attacks and obstacles, and collecting pick-ups. Unfortunately, though, it isn't a patch on some of Hudson's other shooters. Enemies look derivative, their attack patterns are basic, and visually it lacks polish. It also suffers from an abrupt length and only gets challenging on the highest difficulty. Skilled shooter fans will finish it without breaking a sweat and probably won't be in a hurry to replay it.



VIRTUAL BOY WARIO LAND

Year Released: 1995
Developer: Nintendo R&D1



■ ESSENTIALLY AN ENHANCED version of *Wario Land* for the Game Boy, you must help Mario's insane doppelganger, Wario, escape from a deep subterranean grotto while collecting treasure along the way. Wario can barge and throw his enemies but gets his best powers from novelty hats, which allow him to smash boulders, shoot flames and even fly. With lovely cartoon graphics, smooth animation, and 3D used to enhance the level design, this is a must-own Virtual Boy title. Nintendo has always shown its consoles in the best light, and the Virtual Boy was no different. This is arguably the best game on the Virtual Boy.



Virtual Trivia: *The game's original title was* Wario Cruise. *It was renamed* Wario Land *just prior to its release.*

TELEROBOXER

Year Released: 1995
Developer: Nintendo R&D3



■ *TELEROBOXER* IS THE Virtual Boy's only fighting game. It takes the form of a first-person one-on-one boxing game in which you face off against seven robot pugilists. The action is viewed as if you're right there in the ring, which naturally suits a 3D game well.

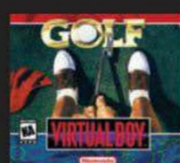


The *Punch-Out!!* comparison comes from the behaviour of your opponents. Though their attack patterns aren't as inventive or whimsical as those of King Hippo, Piston Honda and company, the robot fighters do subscribe to an obvious pattern and have a weakness to certain attacks. Unfortunately, once you discover and begin exploiting them, the challenge drops dramatically.

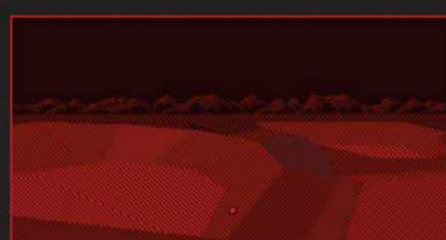
Virtual Trivia: *There is a hidden fighter in the game. To face him, players must defeat all the other opponents without losing a fight.*

GOLF (AKA T&E VIRTUAL GOLF)

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** T&E Soft



■ THE VIRTUAL BOY'S version of the outdoor sport that finds badly dressed people assisted by servants hitting small balls into holes is actually one of the better sports titles on the machine. You have the choice of entering a tournament with 48 computer golfers or can practice your swing in Stroke Play, with both taking place over the same 18 holes. After lining up your golfer and selecting a club and stance, striking the ball is done through a simple spin and power meter. Once airborne, a nice static 3D image of your ball landing flashes up. While another course would have been welcome, fun gameplay, detailed graphics and impressive 3D effects still make this worth a play.







US-ONLY RELEASES

DESPITE POOR DEVELOPER SUPPORT, THE US GOT A HANDFUL OF EXCLUSIVES

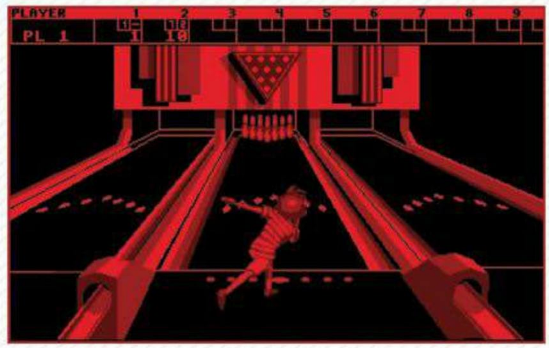
NESTER'S FUNKY BOWLING

Year Released: 1996 **Developer:** Nintendo R&D3



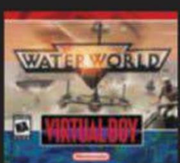
■ *NESTER'S FUNKY BOWLING* is less of a simulation than *Virtual Bowling*. You simply move Nester into position, set the spin and strength of your throw by stopping a swaying arrow on two meters, and away you roll. The game is well presented, with screens flashing up to show Nester's reaction after each roll and also cheesy animations when making strikes and spares. Additionally, there's an addictive little challenge mode in which you're presented with a selection of random spares to hit. *Nester's Funky Bowling* is notable for being the only game on the Virtual Boy to have a proper two-player mode.

Virtual Trivia: *Nester was the former comic strip mascot of* Nintendo Power *magazine.*



WATERWORLD

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Ocean Software



■ NOT REALLY FOLLOWING the script of the film, *Waterworld* sees you saving drowning villagers called 'Atollers' from men on Jet Skis dubbed 'Smokers'. That's it. Once you've shot down all the Smokers and rescued as many Atollers as you can, the game tots up your total and then thrusts you straight back into the same scenario once more. There's no story and no variety. To make matters worse, the action is agonisingly slow, and as your catamaran has more speed and agility than the enemies' Jet Skis, picking off targets is a cinch. Also, graphically, it looks like it was salvaged from the seabed.

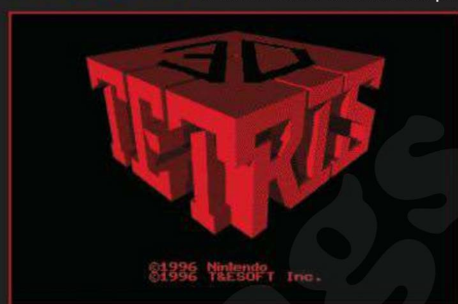


3-D TETRIS

Year Released: 1996 **Developer:** T&E Soft



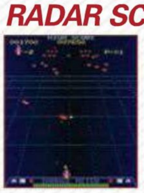
■ THE VIRTUAL BOY received two *Tetris* games, which isn't a surprise given the game's success, but this variant is quite a bit different to all the others and is an unusual take on the popular block-stacking game. Rather than inside a 2D tray, play takes place inside a 5x5 cube, with you trying to construct layers of it with three-dimensional pieces. With three play modes, including one in which you are shown a 3D shape and must try to re-create it, and some convincing 3D visuals, this is a unique *Tetris* variant that feels in tune with the Virtual Boy's strengths.



NINTEND'OHS!

Here are some other commercial failures in videogaming by Nintendo

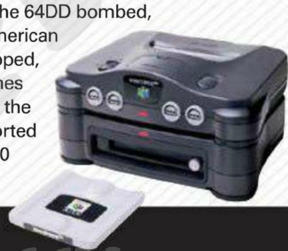
RADAR SCOPE



■ A MODERATE SUCCESS in Japan, for *Radar Scope*'s North American release Nintendo predicted big things and signed off on the manufacture of 3,000 units. However, it didn't sell, and Nintendo's US arm was left with most of the stock sitting in its warehouse. With help from Gunpei Yokoi, a young Shigeru Miyamoto came to Nintendo's rescue when he developed a brand new game using the same arcade hardware. That game was *Donkey Kong*. It was fitted into *Radar Scope* cabinets and became a global phenomenon.

NINTENDO 64DD

■ DESPITE BEING ANNOUNCED before the release of the N64, the 64DD (Disk Drive) was late to surface. It was finally released in Japan in December 1999. Anticipating that the machine would not succeed, Nintendo chose to sell a large portion of machines via online subscription service Radnet. The 64DD bombed, its 2000 North American release was scrapped, and just nine games were released for the platform. It's reported that around 15,000 units were sold.



ROB (ROBOTIC OPERATING BUDDY)



■ THOUGH ROB'S FAME was given a push by the NES Deluxe Pack, you only need to consider the pathetic list of software released for this ambitious peripheral (*Gyromite* and *Stack-Up*) to realise that Nintendo didn't see much of a future, which has caused some cynical analysts to view ROB as something of a Trojan robot, designed to help the NES infiltrate American households. Nonetheless, ROB is symbolic of Nintendo's transition from toy manufacturer. Subsequently, Nintendo turning its back on the plastic robot can be seen as it packing the toys away to turn its focus fully onto videogames.



JAPAN-ONLY RELEASES

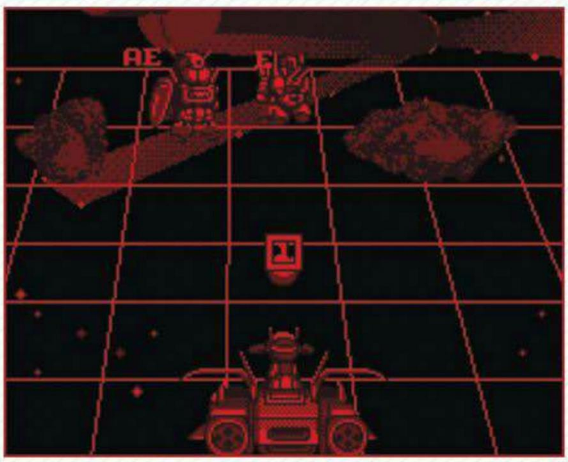
THE VIRTUAL BOY'S HOME TERRITORY BOASTS SOME REAL COLLECTOR'S ITEMS

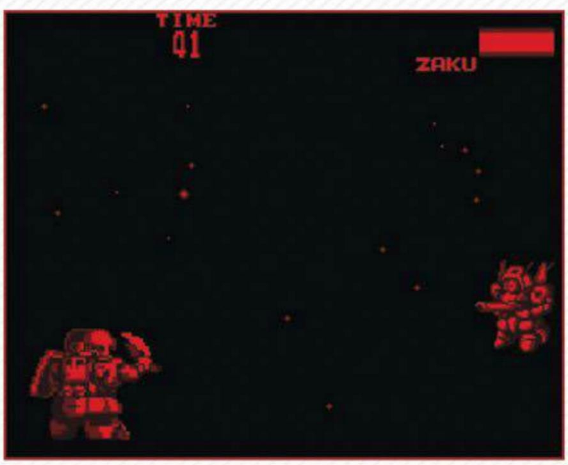
SD GUNDAM DIMENSION WAR

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Bandai



■ BASED ON THE popular anime series, this is one of the Virtual Boy's four holy grail Japanese titles. Sadly, like *Virtual Lab*, this cutesy strategy game is another whose quality doesn't justify its steep asking price, which can frequently top $1,000 in online auctions thanks to its rarity. You take turns with the computer, battling each other's troops – made up of robots and space frigates – with the winner being the first to successfully wipe out the opposing units. The robot-on-robot combat sections present the best use of 3D, showing your mech flying towards its target before engaging in a side-on fight where both units can move towards and away from the screen. There are only eight stages, though, and visually we've seen better-looking NES games.





VIRTUAL LAB

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** J-Wing



■ A WOEFUL *TETRIS*-STYLE puzzler in which you connect things that look like pulsating blood vessels. *Virtual Lab* is another of the Virtual Boy's four rarest titles and is rumoured to have been rushed out of the door in unfinished form when its developer discovered that Nintendo was planning to pull an early plug on the machine. With a hilarious 'Nintenndo' typo on the box and cartridge, passwords dished out despite the fact that there's no actual screen to input them, and three speed settings where 'mid' is oddly faster than 'hi', its shoddiness will have you believing this story to be 100 per cent accurate. With far better puzzle games on the Virtual Boy, it only holds any worth for hardcore collectors with more money than sense.



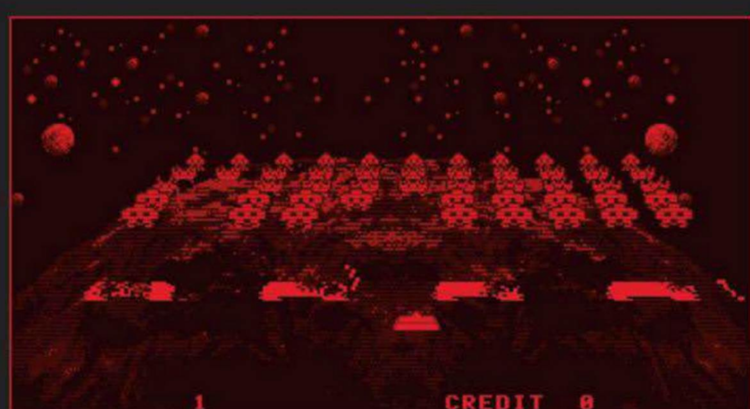
***Virtual Trivia:** Level 100 loops endlessly. Therefore,* Virtual Lab *can be considered a never-ending gaming nightmare.*

SPACE INVADERS VIRTUAL COLLECTION

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Taito



■ ANOTHER SUPER RARE and pricey title, *Space Invaders Virtual Collection* is a double pack of *Space Invaders* and its arcade follow-up, *Space Invaders Part II*. You can play either in their original form or wearing a new 3D body. The new versions tilt the perspective slightly to make the alien invasion appear as if it's coming towards you. Sadly, though, this brings with it issues; it makes it difficult to judge gaps in your defences and dodge or counter enemy fire. As a bonus, the package does include a neat score and time attack mode for both games. Ultimately, however, with the new 3D versions failing to be as entertaining as the originals, it's a pretty disappointing update.



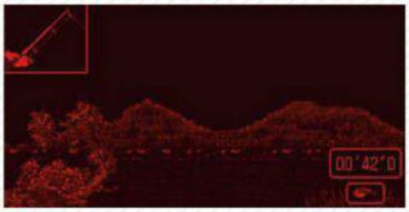


VIRTUAL FISHING

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Pack-In-Video



■ THE VIRTUAL BOY had a surprising number of sports titles, and even fishing was catered for. A map shows six different fishing competitions of varying, undisclosed difficulty, and after selecting one you're given a fixed amount of time to reel in as many fish as you can. This takes place across two screens; initially over the water as you cast your line, and then, once you have a bite, underwater where you must try to gently reel it in. Overall, the graphics and animations are pretty ugly and the 3D effect adds little to the game. Its biggest problem is that it's just not exciting to play.



SPACE SQUASH

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Coconuts Japan



■ *SPACE SQUASH* SEES you control a cute little robot that must defeat a series of other often less cute robots at squash. Looking like a cross between *Breakout* and *Shufflepuck Café*, the winner is the first to three points, earned either by getting the ball past your opponent or hitting them with it until their shield packs up and they explode. And before the start of a match you have the choice to equip one of four perks, including a shield and two shot power-ups. The controls are responsive, and there are plenty of stages too. Add some effective use of 3D and fluid gameplay, and this is another little-known gem for the system.





INSMOUSE NO YAKATA

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Be Top



■ AN FPS SET in a *Resident Evil*-style monster-filled mansion, on paper *Insmouse No Yakata* sounds like it has plenty going for it. Sadly, though, this maze shooter is saddled with some repetitive environments and gameplay. Set across a series of branching stages, leading to four possible endings depending on how well you do, in each you must find the key and exit to progress to the next. Along the way, ammo can be found along with orbs that illuminate your surroundings by unlocking a map screen and showing item whereabouts. But with time to finish each stage being so short and passwords dished out on completion, any tension and atmosphere gets ripped from the game.

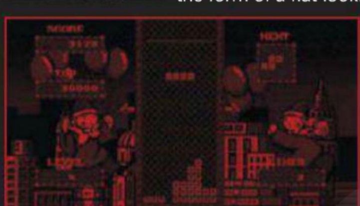
Virtual Trivia: Despite the odd translation, Insmouse No Yakata *is based on HP Lovecraft's novella,* The Shadow Over Innsmouth.

V-TETRIS

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Bullet-Proof Software



■ AS YOU'D IMAGINE, being from the studio behind the excellent Game Boy version of Alexey Pajitnov's classic, *V-Tetris* is a great puzzle title. But let's get the bad stuff out of the way first: the music is awful, and there's no two-player mode. The jewel of this version, though, is a superb new mode that sees the tile container take the form of a flat-looking cylinder that can be rotated, effectively doubling the size of the play area, and forces clearance of multiple lines. Clearing single ones drops a horizontal playing piece on the area behind the section that's in play. Throw in the classic 'endless' and 'clear 25' modes, and it's a superb edition of *Tetris*.

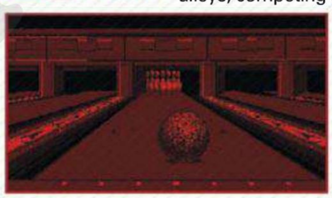


VIRTUAL BOWLING

Year Released: 1995 **Developer:** Athena

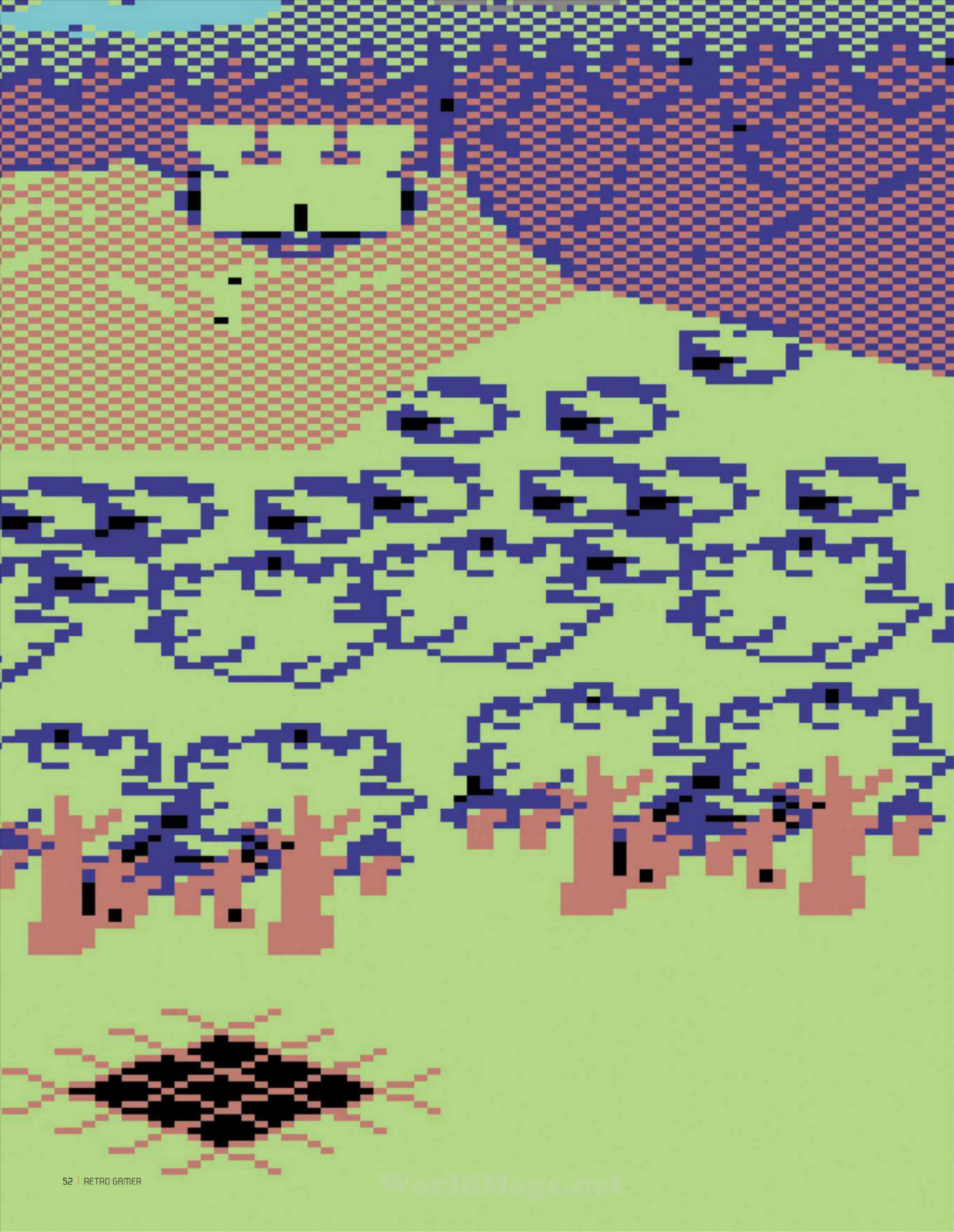


■ THE LAST OF the four rarest VB titles is the best of the bunch. *Virtual Bowling* is a decent and pretty playable bowling simulator, and thanks to its English options is completely import-friendly too. It offers three modes, comprising practice, a quick match option and a tournament where you visit four bowling alleys, competing against computer opponents. This is all complemented by a nice selection of customisation options, from setting the weight of your ball to adjusting how waxy the lane surface is. With detailed visuals, plenty of options and a simple bowling system, this is one of the best games for the machine.





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Twin Kingdom Valley

INTO THE VALLEY…

» RETROREVIVAL



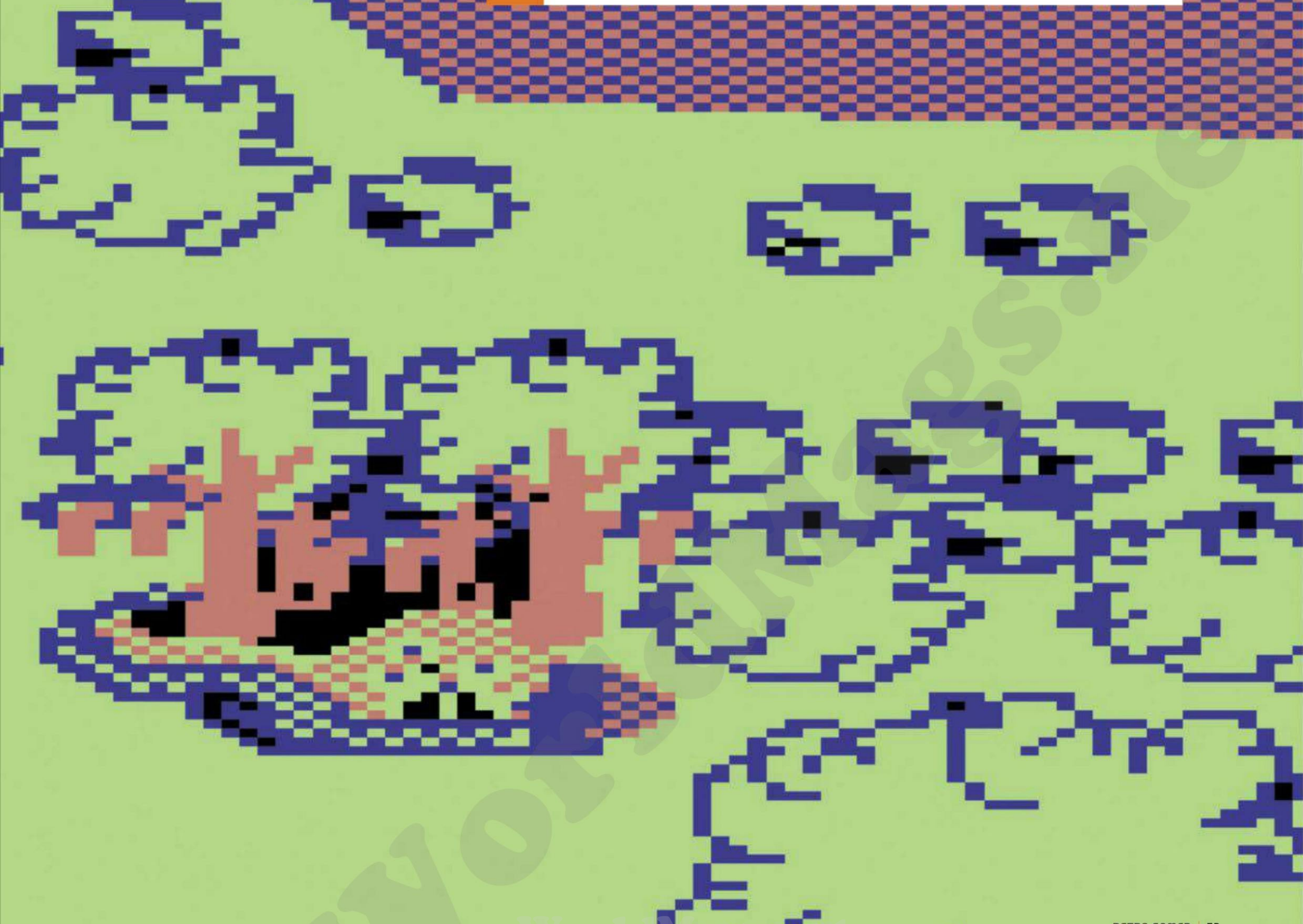
» COMMODORE 64
» BUG-BYTE
» 1983

"You'll enjoy this," said the young chap at the Bug-Byte stand, smiling confidently as he handed me a copy of *Twin Kingdom Valley*. Having spent the whole day immersed in the joyous hurly-burly of 1983's Personal Computer World Show, exploring the crowded aisles and carefully examining the enticing tapes each software house had on offer, I'd finally bought my first game for the new Commodore 64 waiting for me at home.

You always remember your first time, don't you? I can still feel the warmth of the flickering fire in the log cabin base, the trepidation as I inched along the corridors of that castle in the desert, and the malicious glee of typing in 'HIT GORILLA WITH CLUB'. But what I remember most clearly is that sense of not being alone. In the text adventures I'd played before, guards always remained at their posts and no one stole the treasure before you arrived. Now, you were just one soul wandering this vast world, stumbling across battles in progress, surprised that a troll might choose to fight or run, and realising that a giant could become a powerful ally on your quest. Discovering that drinking ale in the Sword Inn would quench your thirst but reduce your strength was also an important life lesson.

Fast forward to 2006. A friend of mine had created a marvellous mobile phone version of *Twin Kingdom Valley*, complete with ingenious text input and beautiful miniaturised reproductions of the graphics that accompanied each of the 190 locations.

I put together a little feature for **RG33**, which involved phoning original author Trevor Hall, now resident in California. At the end of the interview, I told the tale of that PCW Show and the knowing smile of the salesman that sold me my copy. There was a burst of laughter down the phone. "That was me," chuckled Trevor. "I was right, wasn't I?"



THE MAKING OF

THE X-WING

Star Wars may be a series that has become renowned for constant re-releases, but there was a time when PC gamers saw the franchise at its very best. Kim Wild discovers from David Wessman and Ed Kilham how a critically acclaimed space combat series developed and what made it so memorable



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS
» **DEVELOPER:** TOTALLY GAMES
» **RELEASED:** 1993, 1994, 1997, 1999
» **PLATFORM:** PC
» **GENRE:** SPACE SIMULATION

The year is 1990. Lucasfilm has already established itself as a quality games developer with hit titles including *Rescue On Fractalus!*, *Maniac Mansion*, *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders*, *Loom* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and is rapidly expanding. At around the same time, David Wessman is employed by Lucasfilm as a games tester, having left a job in the music industry as a concert audio engineer. David was soon drawn to the World War II flight simulators that were being developed by Totally Games for Lucasfilm.

"I quickly realised that the flight combat games I was most interested in were being developed by Larry Holland, an independent contractor, and a few subcontractors," David tells us. "I went out of my way to get assigned to *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe* and its expansions so that I could meet Larry and convince him to hire me directly. I made a good impression and it paid off."

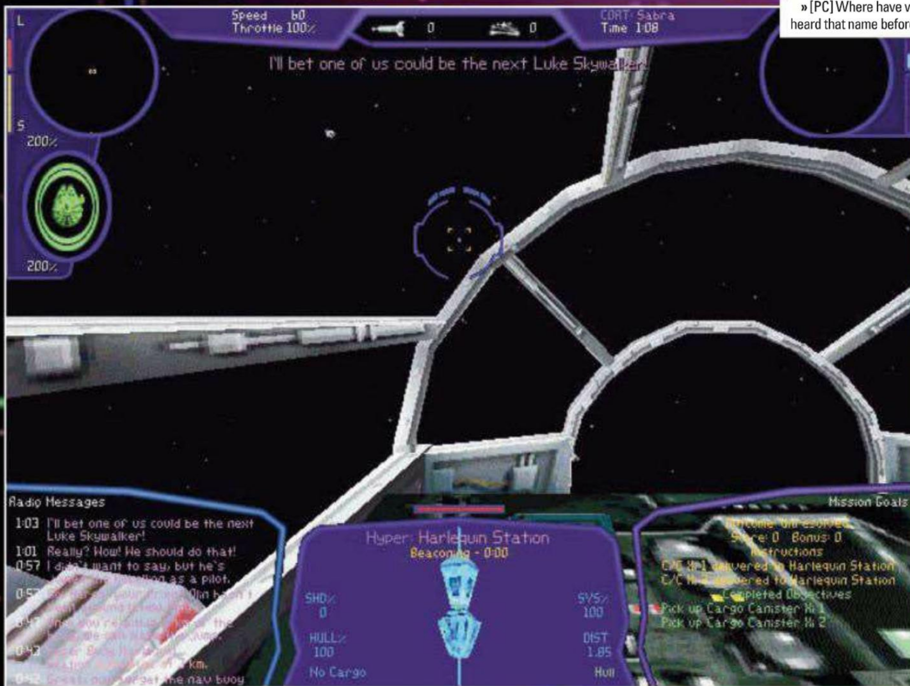
It wouldn't be long before an internal reorganisation would rebrand Lucasfilm, with Industrial Light & Magic and Skywalker Sound consolidated as Lucas Digital Ltd and the games division becoming known as LucasArts in 1991. The licence for *Star Wars* games had previously been held with publisher Brøderbund, which had



Photo: NASA/CXC/Penn State/L Townsley et al.

THE MAKING OF





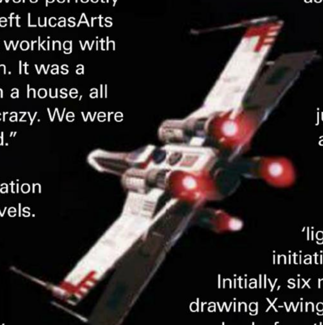
» [PC] Where have we heard that name before?

been responsible for the conversions of the *Star Wars* arcade game to the C64 and PC, and the rights were returning to LucasArts that year.

Ed Kilham went on to work for LucasArts upon leaving college and came up with some initial ideas for an *X-Wing* game. "I started working for Totally Games when they were Peregrine Software," he recounts. "I was working at LucasArts at the time, where Larry was finishing *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe*. I was working on the early ideas for *X-Wing* and it was clear that Lawrence Holland and his team were perfectly positioned to do the game, so I left LucasArts and joined Larry. It was fantastic working with Larry, Peter Lincroft and the team. It was a small group of people working in a house, all crammed together working like crazy. We were passionate and intensely focused."

Space combat games always appealed to David. "Space simulation games appeal to me on many levels. Aside from the subject matter, I enjoy them because they are skill-based. Such games are intrinsically rewarding – the more you play, the better you get, the better you get, the more you enjoy it, the more you enjoy it, the more you play, and so on."

Ed's role meant that he was responsible for the audio, cinematics, mission-building tool, memory and flight engine that would form the basic building blocks for the series. "I was on a ski trip with Peter when I came up with the idea for the tool that would be used to make the [flight engine] screens and the cinematics. The tool was a simple 2D image editor with a timeline control and the ability to keyframe static and animated images, associate animations with mouse input, and allow artists to link to sound effects and music. What was great about the tool was the simplicity and power. Every screen and cinematic in the game was built using that tool."



Around this time, Lawrence Holland, now running Totally Games, started work on a licensed *Star Wars* videogame entitled *X-Wing*, where David became the lead internal tester. Yet this would just be the beginning of David's role at the company. "Even though I'd been hired as a lead tester, Larry rewarded initiative," David recalls. "One day we received a sell sheet for *X-Wing* from the LucasArts marketing folks. It was not just inaccurate but poorly written, and I knew I could do better. I showed my rewrite to Larry and he was happy with it, so he asked LucasArts to use it. That was a 'lightbulb' moment for me – take the initiative when you can!"

Initially, six months was spent on hand-drawing X-wings and other ships from different angles before the decision was reached to re-create those in 3D. Working with such a well-known property was an aspect that was taken to heart, says David: "We took our responsibility to be faithful to the licence very seriously. Part of this was just the company culture at Totally Games – the previous three WWII air combat games were as authentic as possible."

Ed recalls that a lot of work went into reproducing the craft out of a genuine love for the source material: "The artists spent a great deal of time working on the original designs of the spacecraft in *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*. Every model

ACE COMBAT

STAR WARS (ARCADE)



One of the most memorable arcade games to be released in the Eighties, *Star Wars* from Atari is an excellent combat title that stands up well today. The player's goal is to eliminate the Death Star within three crucial stages.

STAR WARS: REBEL ASSAULT (PC)



Although by today's standards looking a bit rough around the edges, *Rebel Assault* made great use of CD-ROM technology at the time, incorporating full FMV sequences. It was also the first game to be released by LucasArts on the CD-ROM format.

STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON II: ROGUE LEADER (GAMECUBE)



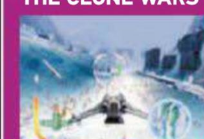
A superb follow-up to the N64 original, this GameCube exclusive did an excellent job of re-creating the *Star Wars* universe. Flying down the trench to launch torpedoes at the end of the opening level will forever remain a highlight.

STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE (GAMECUBE)

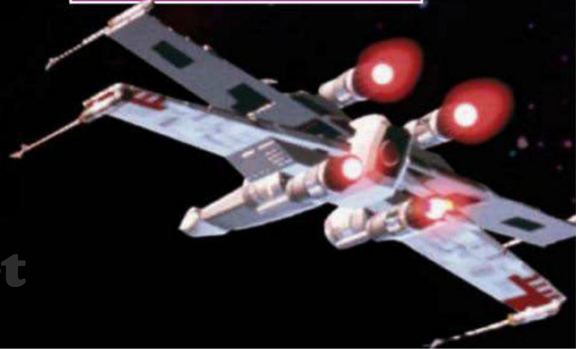


While it never lived up to its predecessor due to the inclusion of some poorly implemented on-foot sections, *Rebel Strike* nevertheless boasted impressive space combat missions and included many of *Rogue Leader*'s missions within the multiplayer co-op mode.

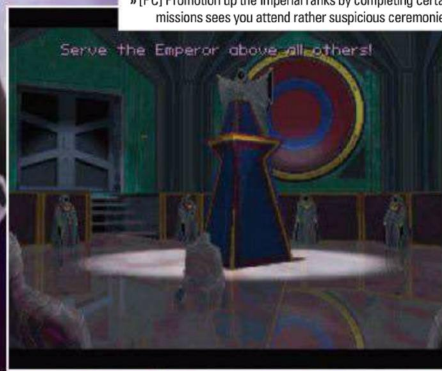
STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS (XBOX)



Star Wars: The Clone Wars managed to be a decent but otherwise unremarkable space outing for the long-running series, with the Xbox release having the bonus of being able to play against others online over Xbox Live, increasing its replay value and appeal to fans.







» [PC] Promotion up the Imperial ranks by completing certain missions sees you attend rather suspicious ceremonies.

was reproduced with loving detail. We were huge *Star Wars* fans, so building those ships was pure heaven. At the time we were using 3DS Max and I would defer to the artists on the exact techniques they used. We did have a lot of reference because we were working directly with LucasArts."

As development on *X-Wing* progressed, David became more and more involved with the creation process. "Later on, when *X-Wing* was finally coming together and a mission builder tool was created," he says, "Larry let anyone who wanted to give it a try do so. Myself and my good friend David Maxwell proved to be the most prolific and proficient, so we ended up as the main mission builders on *X-Wing*, and the only mission builders on its expansions and *TIE Fighter* and its expansions."

> Death or capture often meant a complete restart of a campaign, which frustrated players at the time

Upon the release of *Star Wars: X-Wing* in 1993, the game became critically acclaimed and went on to become the bestselling game of the year. Set across three campaigns comprising over 12 missions each, *X-Wing* featured an original storyline portrayed with the use of hand-drawn artwork, mission briefings and radio dialogue. LucasArts' iMuse system, which had been created for its early adventure games, was used to great effect, blending together iconic *Star Wars* themes with new audio mixes that would adapt according to the action on screen.

The first thing that becomes apparent when playing *X-Wing* is not only its accomplishments at the time for being a sophisticated space combat game, but the sensation of being in control of a fully functioning ship. Much of this is owed to the use of a full 3D engine that was greatly improved from the one used in *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe*. Although easy to grasp the basics of ship control, the sheer number of options available to the player – targeting systems, various throttle settings, multiple viewpoints, commanding wingmen, managing weapons, flight manoeuvres – means that it's a tricky game to master and is very much a simulation at heart. It's a game where use of a joypad combined with the keyboard is a necessity rather than an option. For many gamers, *X-Wing* was the perfect excuse to purchase a flight stick to perform some of the more intricate movements involved during combat. The beauty of the game also lay in its mission objectives. The completion of primary and secondary goals was essential in order to succeed, but the mission doesn't end there, leaving you free to explore space and see if you can uncover the bonus missions, which are only ever revealed when completed. This meant that more ambitious players could truly aim to master each mission and gave scope for replaying the game long after the credits had rolled.

Planning this stage was quite a challenge for the team. "During that period of game development, we were constantly discussing game flow and mission organisation," explains Ed. "Some teams were doing heavily branching approaches where you could play the game and experience a totally different path each time. It was becoming clear that making branching mission trees was very expensive and the average consumer would end up only seeing a small portion of the game. Our approach to encourage replay was to offer primary, secondary and tertiary goals. In addition, our mission builders became incredibly good at space fighter combat and began to develop a variety of techniques that allowed them to win difficult missions. We realised that if we wanted to make the game accessible, but also have it be challenging, we needed to be able to layer the difficulty so that everyone could win, but hardcore gamers would be challenged. The advice was basically hints for the stronger players on how to improve to complete all aspects of a mission."

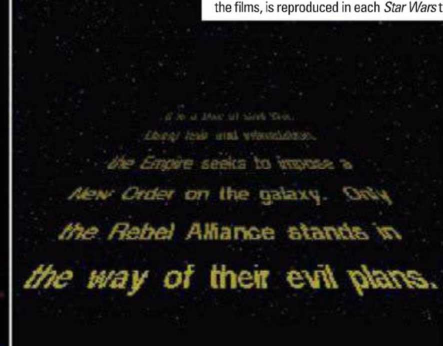
While you may be battling starfighters and carrying out reconnaissance tasks, success comes down to becoming an expert pilot, not just on your combat ability. The high difficulty level becomes apparent during missions, where some can be retried, but death or capture by opposing forces often means game over and a complete restart of a campaign – a factor that frustrated players at the time.

Expansion packs in the form of *Imperial Pursuit* and *B-Wing* were released during the same year. *Imperial Pursuit* added an additional campaign



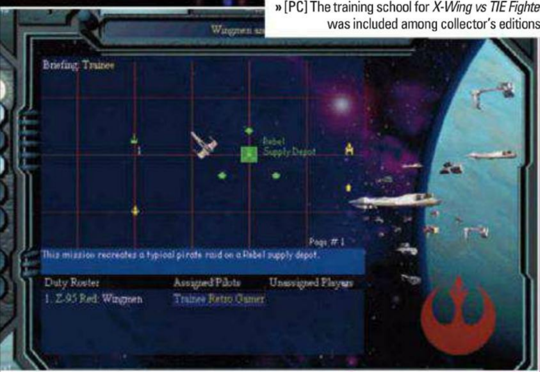
» [PC] *Alliance*'s attention to detail is astounding, with every camera angle inside and outside your craft catered for.





» [PC] This scrolling introduction, imitated from the films, is reproduced in each *Star Wars* title.

THE MAKING OF



» [PC] The training school for *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter* was included among collector's editions.



» [PC] The interior of a TIE fighter is simpler than that of an X-wing, but also more vulnerable due to its lack of shields.

that took place after the destruction of the Death Star and a brand new ship, the TIE Advanced. *B-Wing* added the ability to fly its namesake and a whole new campaign. *B-Wing*'s medal case hinted at room for an additional expansion pack, but it would never materialise despite numerous rumours of a sixth campaign and talk of Snowspeeder missions.

With *X-Wing* under its belt, it was inevitable that LucasArts would be keen on another *Star Wars* title in a similar mould, and plans for the 1994 release of *Star Wars: TIE Fighter* quickly came to light. However, rather than just deliver an identikit sequel, Holland and the team performed a masterstroke: letting the player become the bad guy. As a member of the Imperial Navy, it's your role to serve the Emperor and move up the ranks to work alongside Darth Vader himself. Portraying events from the other side meant an interesting viewpoint of the Empire as the innocent party, merely desiring peace through the use of power and control. Initially in control of a basic TIE fighter, which is a far nippier machine than the last game's X-wing but with more limited defences, the player will later get to control more advanced models.

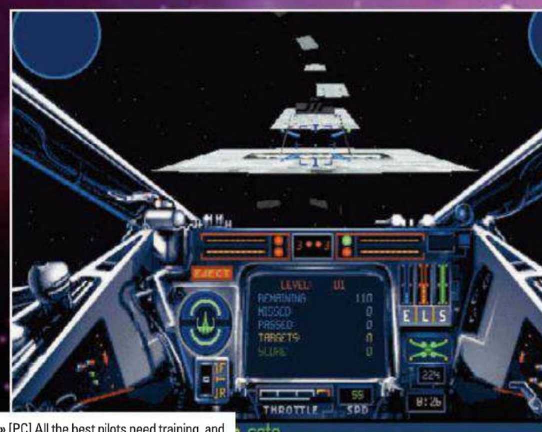
> TIE Fighter was a much tighter and more balanced experience, with a lot more depth and gameplay

When it came to Ed working on the sequel, lots of work went into improving on what had already been implemented within *X-Wing*. "Peter focused on the 3D engine and Larry did all the heavy lifting in the simulation/gameplay. I focused on improving the mission-building tool while Peter went to work on improving rendering," recalls Ed. "Larry did what he always does, which is to add wonderful depth to the game experience. I don't think we spent a particularly long time working on the story; it probably took us a few weeks. The real work was making all the art to tell the story. The artists had a blast working on concepts for new spaceship designs, and the mission builders started working with Larry on the overall mission flow. Because we were a small team, it was a bit of planning and a whole lot of rolling up our sleeves and going to work."

There was a concern, however, that players would not be receptive to playing as the enemy. "We had done *X-Wing*, so we figured it would be cool to play the other side and experience a whole new set of ships," remembers Ed. "There was a lot of concern that consumers didn't want to play the bad guy. This definitely did not turn out to be the case. What helped is that we learned a lot about difficulty tuning and balancing, so *TIE Fighter* was a much tighter and more balanced experience, with a lot more depth and gameplay. It was also extremely fun to play. I remember playing it even after we shipped. I had a lot of fun designing the meta-game around the tattoos you receive from the Sith, and I also got to be the voice of Admiral Thrawn."

Perhaps as a result of playing for the 'dark side', licensing was relaxed more for *TIE Fighter*, allowing for the creation of unique storylines and all-new battles. The fact that an Imperial Navy was approved by George Lucas despite the non-existence of such an organisation in the *Star Wars* canon at the time showed how much freedom the team was allowed. "There were only a few times when we were asked to change something," recalls David. "On *TIE Fighter* I was told I had to remove the word 'pogrom' from a mission briefing because it was feared that Jewish people might be offended. I was also asked to tone down some dialogue I had written for Darth Vader because it was 'too dark'!"

With over 50 missions across seven campaigns, *TIE Fighter* is an even larger production than its predecessor. Thankfully, the feature of leaving the player stranded due to capture was dropped, meaning mission failure is punished purely by a retry and no resetting of your rank or score. The number of resources that had to be managed on your ship was reduced, and although still a combat simulation, it became a more accessible experience than *X-Wing*.



» [PC] All the best pilots need training, and there is plenty available for new recruits.



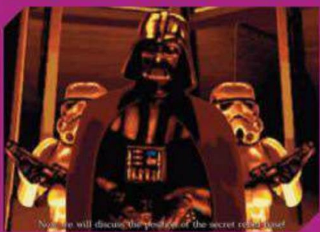
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PS2, PC, XBOX
YEAR: 2003

STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2002

ALIEN SYNDROME (2007)
SYSTEM: WII, PSP
YEAR: 2007

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



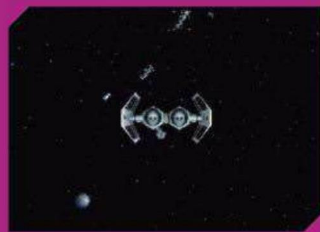
CAPTURE BY DARTH VADER (X-WING)

Although it's a scene you'll frequently encounter due to the game's tough difficulty level, the first occasion you are left adrift in space only to be 'rescued' by Darth Vader definitely sticks in the mind.

TIE COMBAT (X-WING)

While many battles in space are fierce and frantic, coming across your first TIE fighter encounter is nothing short of thrilling, made all the more so by the tight, fast manoeuvres that such streamlined enemy craft can perform in their efforts to defeat you.





THE DARK SIDE (TIE FIGHTER)

Nothing quite beats being able to pilot a TIE fighter in the name of the Galactic Empire. Being addressed by the Emperor, receiving orders from Darth Vader and even fighting alongside him in a mission add to the experience of fighting for the enemy.

THE FINALE (X-WING ALLIANCE)

A fitting end to the series and a thrilling conclusion to the game. The re-creation of the Battle of Endor, where the second Death Star can be destroyed while piloting the Millennium Falcon, is utterly compelling.





» [PC] The cut-scenes interspersed throughout *TIE Fighter* add to the cinematic experience.



» [PC] Missions in *Alliance* are varied, from transporting other vehicles and collecting cargo to engaging in combat.

The release of *TIE Fighter* in 1994 prompted huge critical acclaim and was a commercial smash, cementing LucasArts' reputation for high-quality space combat simulations. Its success did mean that the actions of the developers were monitored more closely, although considerable freedom was still allowed. "At first I don't think we were even that much on their radar, but after the success of *TIE Fighter* we were subjected to more scrutiny," says David. "I had taken it upon myself to become our in-house subject matter expert. Besides watching the movies over and over again, I started reading every *Star Wars* novel, comic book and RPG book I could get my hands on. I immersed myself in the *Star Wars* lore, absorbing everything I could about the universe. If anything, I became sort of a pest about it and insisted that we re-create the *Star Wars* universe as accurately as possible. This was not always easy."

Despite *TIE Fighter's* success, David did have ideas for improvement: "My biggest regret is that we never implemented the RTS mode that Peter Lincroft and I came up with while we were implementing the map mode in *TIE Fighter*. I tried again during *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter* – my original design was a hybrid RTS/space combat simulator – and again during *X-Wing Alliance*, but both times I was told we didn't have enough time for such an ambitious feature. You can imagine my delight when [Relic Entertainment's 3D space RTS] *Homeworld* was released to great acclaim and success some seven months after *XWA*."

Once again, an expansion disk would be released the same year entitled *Defender Of The Empire*, adding a further 22 missions and new spacecraft, including a different TIE Defender. Ed is very proud of both *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*, but felt the latter was superior: "I am very happy with the way *TIE Fighter* worked out. *X-Wing* was a bit too difficult, and it would have been better if we had balanced the missions for our customers rather than ourselves."

X-Wing vs TIE Fighter became the next project for the team and took a different approach to the two previous instalments, focusing on multiplayer and being able to play against others in the rapidly expanding online arena, albeit within the slower world of dial-up internet access.

"We started work on a Millennium Falcon game but cancelled it after five months when we realised we wouldn't be able to meet fan expectations," David reveals. "We were too small – about 15 people – and didn't have enough time. Since multiplayer was the single most requested feature, we decided to make *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter*. I became the lead mission designer for *XvT* but was frustrated that I wasn't acknowledged as the lead designer. Larry explained that he didn't believe anyone should have that title because everyone on the team was a designer in some respect."

It was a game that had a mixed response from its user base upon its 1997 release, with sales for the title proving to be quite slow. The fact that all missions could be played in single-player but didn't have any story-based structure meant the package appealed to a niche audience. A cut-down version of the game, *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter: Flight School*, was bundled in *X-Wing*

THE MAKING OF



X-WING HIGHLIGHTS

We reveal the franchise's best missions. Many Bothans died to bring you this information. . .





DESTROY IMPERIAL CONVOY

Game: X-Wing

It might be the first mission, but there's plenty going on to get stuck into. Aside from being requested to destroy some impressive freighters that easily dwarf your ship, you have to stop several from entering hyperspace and take on the odd TIE fighter here and there.



DEATH STAR TRENCH RUN

Game: X-Wing

One of those classic *Star Wars* re-creations. Completing the Death Star trench run involves lots of agility and particular skill to navigate without being blown to smithereens. Made all the trickier by the sides of the trench and guns being identical in colour.

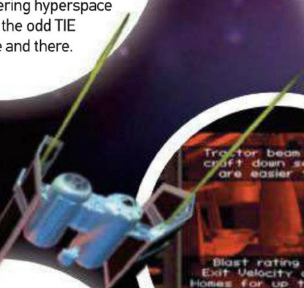


BALANCE OF POWER

Game: X-Wing vs TIE Fighter

As primarily a multiplayer game comprised of standalone missions, it's hard to pick one from *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter*, but the *Balance Of Power* expansion pack is excellent. Being able to destroy a Super Star Destroyer is incredible, even if it does seem stupidly weak against torpedoes and really small ships.

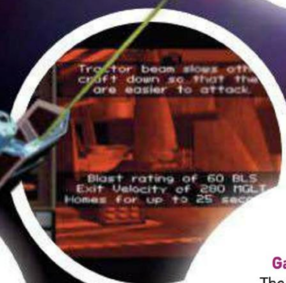




AFTERMATH OF HOTH

Game: TIE Fighter

In the first tour campaign, you'll embark on a straightforward craft inspection, leading to a series of ambushes from Mugari pirates, Rebel craft and X-wings. The constant variety of ships you'll encounter in combat plus the knowledge you're fighting for the 'dark side' make it all the more thrilling.



NEW THREATS

Game: TIE Fighter

The Rneekii pirates are ransoming a scientist in exchange for an unarmed shuttle. The job is to guard the shuttle before turning the tables on the unsuspecting pirates. Aside from being an excellently written, well-paced campaign, you also get to play with a new hyper beam.



TREACHERY AT OTTEGA

Game: TIE Fighter

One of the most significant missions story-wise, as Emperor Palpatine has been abducted by Admiral Zaarin. As a result, although you are the flight leader, Darth Vader himself will be overseeing the action, with the rest of the mission involving tracking down the traitor to the Empire.





DEEP SPACE STRIKE EVALUATION

Game: X-Wing Alliance

As *X-Wing Alliance* is far more story-oriented, it's hardly surprising when things start to get personal. Early on in the game you are informed of Olen's shocking decision to join the Rebellion, something your character will also go on to do after a family tragedy by training as a starfighter pilot.



RESCUE UNCLE ANTAN

Game: X-Wing Alliance

As well as undertaking missions for the Rebellion, at times you'll have to embark on jobs of a personal nature. In this case, it involves rescuing Uncle Antan, who has been captured by Viraxo, who is already responsible for your father's death.





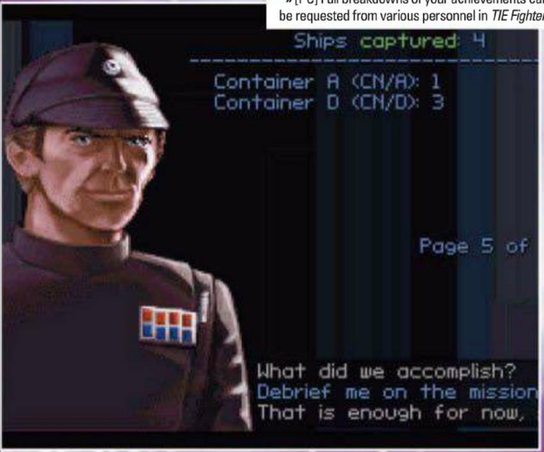
BATTLE OF ENDOR

Game: X-Wing Alliance

Split into four parts, the finale of *X-Wing Alliance* is the most impressive of the series. With the whole of the Rebel Alliance in combat and ships required to fly into the second Death Star, you can expect many traps and unexpected encounters before you reach your final objective.



» [PC] Full breakdowns of your achievements can be requested from various personnel in *TIE Fighter*.



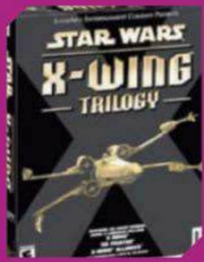
COLLECT THEM ALL



X-WING COLLECTOR'S EDITION
This CD-ROM edition featured improved 3D graphics, upgraded sound and six additional bonus missions, with two extra expansion campaigns: *B-Wing* and *Imperial Pursuit*. Some versions also included *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter: Flight School* and tie-in novella *The Farlander Papers*.



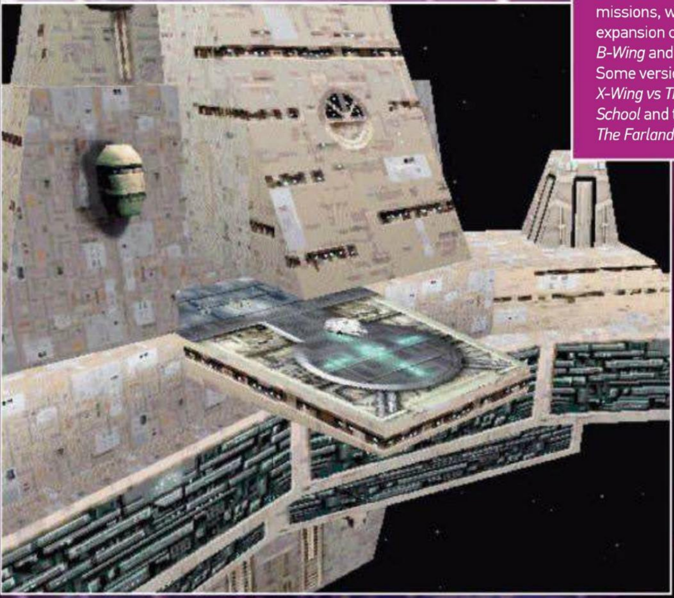
TIE FIGHTER COLLECTOR'S EDITION
Overhauls for the CD-ROM release included improved screen resolution to SVGA (640x480) standard, new cut-scenes, and voiced and interactive mission briefings. Alongside the original, two expansion packs were included, one of which, *Enemies Of The Empire*, was entirely new to the series.



X-WING TRILOGY
This compilation is almost identical in contents to the two collector's editions except for the inclusion of *X-Wing Alliance*. Only a demo of *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter* is included in the box, as the full game oddly never appeared on any compilation. It's a solid package that's worth picking up, but there is another alternative…



X-WING COLLECTOR SERIES
Another re-release, and this time both *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* received additional changes. Both of the games used the new *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter* 3D engine as well as revamped audio, which made them a good upgrade if you owned the originals. The cut-down *X-Wing vs TIE Fighter: Flight School* was also included.



compilations in an attempt to improve the full game's sales, but to no avail. The *Balance Of Power* expansion pack would follow, adding a campaign with a new storyline, along with additional melee and combat missions.

The last game in the series would come in the form of 1999's *X-Wing Alliance*, by far Totally Games' biggest and most accomplished project to date. Even today, the game is absolutely stunning, packed full of personality and some fantastic cut-scenes. With the *Star Wars* franchise becoming bigger by the day as the hype for that summer's release of *The Phantom Menace* ramped up, it meant that accuracy for key scenes became increasingly important.

"For example," says David, "in re-creating the Battle of Endor I watched every combat sequence over and over and over again, frame by frame. I wanted to make sure everything was positioned exactly as it is in the film, but I soon discovered that there are enormous continuity errors in those sequences! Of course, when the films were made, I don't think they were worried that some day someone would try to re-create it in a simulator game!"

Of the series, *X-Wing Alliance* is much more story-driven, focusing initially on the relationship between your pilot and his siblings before eventually joining the Rebel Alliance. Although still very much a simulation at heart, the difficulty level had been tweaked so that failure during a mission means a simple restart, which wasn't the case in the original *X-Wing*.

Understandably, there were certain aspects that had to be omitted. "During *X-Wing Alliance* we were told we had to remove any references to droid fighters," David recalls. "We weren't told why, but we assumed it was because there was something similar in *Episode I*. In the end, we were allowed to keep the droid fighters because we were simply too far along in development to do major surgery to the game's content – at least not without incurring a prohibitive delay on our release date."

David has fond memories of his time at Totally Games: "We were a lean, mean production machine, and our games were great and sold well. Inevitably, there would be changes, though, and as the studio grew and evolved, some of those changes turned out to be for the worse. These changes initiated an exodus of the senior talent that had founded the company. Ed Kilham was the first to leave, and by the time I left only one other person from the original *X-Wing* team remained other than Larry."

David's departure saw him work at a number of developers, including Stormfront Studios (*Blood Wake*), Starbreeze Studios (*The Chronicles Of Riddick*), Volition (*Saints Row*) and Backbone Entertainment (*Death Jr II: Root Of Evil*). In 2007, he worked on a training simulation at Destineer before eventually settling down to become a professor in game design at the University of Advancing Technology in Arizona. Ed left to work at Ronin Entertainment (*Star Wars: Force Commander*, *Armor Command*, *Neo Hunter*) in 1995 before becoming technical director of Electronic Arts in 2002, where he remains, overseeing titles throughout the company, including those of subsidiary Black Box Games.

Space combat games have declined in recent years, with few to carry on the legacy of *X-Wing* and titles such as *Wing Commander* or *Colony Wars*. David has a theory on why: "The particular skills required are of a higher order than the eye-hand co-ordination and fast reflexes of standard shooters. It also requires quick thinking and problem solving based on a very high level of situational awareness. All of this is compounded by the fact that you are in a 3D space in which you can move in any direction, and threats come from anywhere. It's a sad, true fact that many people have difficulty navigating a 3D space. Not many publishers are willing to risk the amount of money it takes to make a triple-A game when they know the majority of the public won't buy the game because they're incapable of playing it."

Almost 20 years have passed since the development of *Star Wars: X-Wing*, and the *Star Wars* licence has been mercilessly milked to the point of overkill. While there have been a few notable successes in this field through the likes of the *Rogue Leader* series and *Rebel Assault*, there are few games that capture the spirit of what it must be like to fly within the *Star Wars* universe. In space, no one may be able to hear you scream, but with battles like this to engage in, who's going to have the time to care?

Kid Icarus

ANGEL LAND STORY

The recent release of *Kid Icarus: Uprising* on 3DS comes after two full decades of fans petitioning, shouting and otherwise stamping their feet for a sequel to the original 1987 *Kid Icarus.* But where has all that fan demand come from? Many people who've tried *Kid Icarus* just can't see what all the fuss is about but that's because many of them didn't play beyond the first few screens. Go deeper and you'll find it's just as wondrous and surprising as the big three NES games – *Mario*, *Zelda* and *Metroid* – and is more than deserving of its cult status. If you're currently enjoying *Kid Icarus: Uprising*, do yourself a favour and get stuck into the original.

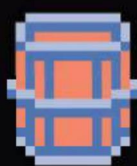
The Chalice and Bottle
The Chalice and Bottle both refill life. The latter renews life automatically upon death.



Hearts
Hearts aren't actually for health. They're a form of currency in *Kid Icarus*.



The Barrel
The Barrel allows you to carry up to five bottles at once.



Angel Feather
Fall down a hole while equipped with an Angel Feather and you'll float back up to safety.



The Flaming Arrow
The Flaming Arrow allows Pit to fire an extra harmful fireball but requires at least one full life block to use.



Magic Wand
This magic wand rotates two Protective Crystals around Pit.



The Strength Arrow
The Strength Arrow, uh, increases the strength of Pit's arrows.



Hammer
The limited-use Hammer can be used as a weapon but also frees Centurions from their statues so that they can help Pit in boss battles.



The Sacred Bow
The Sacred Bow extends the range of Pit's bow but requires at least two full life blocks to use.



The Mirror Shield
You get the Mirror Shield towards the end of the game: it blocks enemy shots including those of final boss Medusa.



The Harp
Pick up the Harp and all enemies on-screen will turn into Hammers.



The Map, Torch and Pencil
The Map, Torch and Pencil are used to locate your position in labyrinths and mark off all rooms visited.



The Light Arrow
The Light Arrow is also found toward the end of the game and lets Pit shoot a laser across the screen.



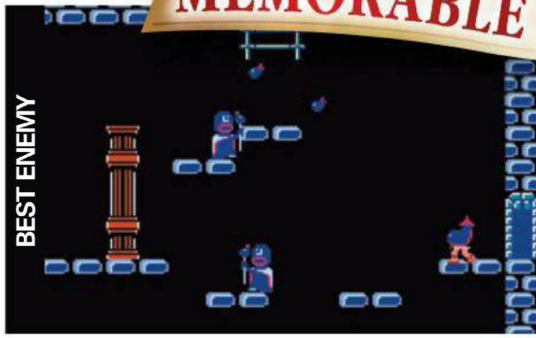
Wings of Pegasus
The third and final treasure you're given for the final level is the Wings Of Pegasus, which allow Pit to fly.





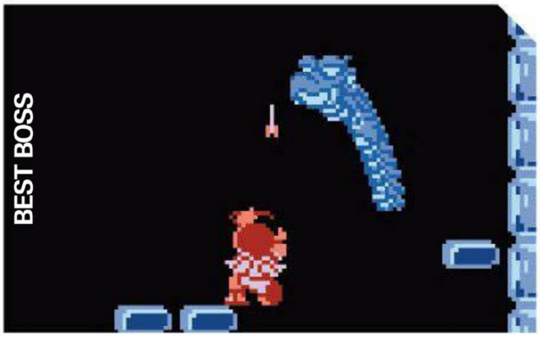
A true adventure

Kid Icarus might not have the same level of exposure as other Nintendo games like *Legend Of Zelda* and *Metroid* but it truly deserves to be mentioned in the same breath. Like both of those games, it's beloved because of the way it presents a world of possibility and adventure. It's a little more linear, admittedly, but new players will still venture into Pit's world with no idea of what to expect. There are so many surprises to find and rooms full of challenges to overcome that every discovery feels like a personal accomplishment. You'll never forget your first playthrough.



The Eggplant Wizard

Only Nintendo would have the imagination and the guts to make one of its toughest enemies a walking eggplant with a face. The Eggplant Wizard roams the dungeons of *Kid Icarus* and throws eggplants at Pit in such a way that they're pretty tricky to avoid. Get struck by one and Pit's head will also turn into an eggplant, which is pretty funny but very annoying since it renders him completely unable to use weapons unless he can find a nurse to heal him. Such dirty tricks lend *Kid Icarus* its reputation for difficulty but also add to that crucial feeling that anything can and will happen.



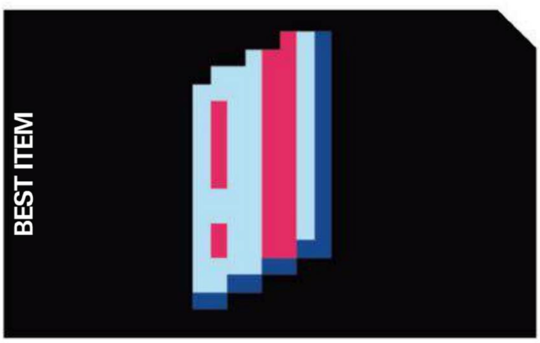
Hewdraw

There are only four bosses in the whole of *Kid Icarus* and, to be honest, they're all about as good as each other. If we *had* to pick one, then we'd go for this snaking dragon monster who bounces around a room filled with lava pits, making him the most difficult of the four bosses to defeat. And extra credit has to be given to Hewdraw's unusual name. Allegedly a mistranslation of Hydra in the *Kid Icarus* manual, it is paid homage to in 3DS's *Kid Icarus: Uprising*, which features a 3D re-interpretation of the boss complete with possibly accidental name.



Buy somethin' will ya!

Part of *Kid Icarus*'s charm is the sheer number of secrets to find. Like *Mario* and *Zelda*, the game is packed with tons of secret passages, glitches to exploit and little tricks to give you an advantage. You could spend years working out some of these but we'll give you one to get going. When you reach a shopkeeper's room, plug a second controller into your NES and hit the A and B buttons. This will change the price of items. Though, beware, they don't always go down in value. This trick also won't work on the 3DS remake of *Kid Icarus*, for obvious reasons.



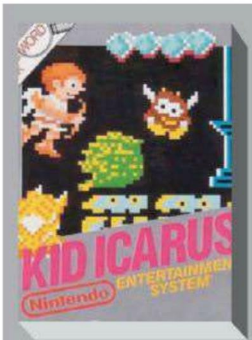
The credit card

There are tons of power-ups and collectible items in *Kid Icarus* and, unlike *Zelda* or *Metroid*, these items aren't necessary to clear the game. The beauty of this is that some are rarer than others and some have very precise, interesting uses. You could conceivably play through the whole game and still not see all of them. Our favourite? It *has* to be the credit card. This rare item allows you to buy items that you'd don't have enough hearts to afford but, cleverly, you'll then go into debt and have to collect more hearts later on to pay it off. A good life lesson to be learned there, we feel.



The Palace in the Sky

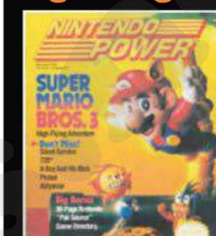
One of the reasons *Kid Icarus* is so underrated is that its extreme difficulty puts a lot of new players off and they give in before getting past the first few screens. That's a shame because it's beyond that opening vertical ascent that the game really gets interesting. It later opens up into more exploratory *Metroid*-style areas, and lavishes Pit with new powers and abilities. If you're skilled enough to get there then the fourth world, The Palace In The Sky is the highlight. It sees Pit don a winged suit of armour and turns into a sort of side-scrolling shoot-'em-up, epitomising *Kid Icarus*'s ability to never stay the same.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** NES
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO R&D1
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE

What the press said… ages ago



Nintendo Power

Kid Icarus was already a year old by the time *Nintendo Power* came into existence, so it was never reviewed. But its famous difficulty did prompt the magazine to print a player's guide with lots of handy passwords. "You might expect an adventure in a place called Angel Land to be rather tame," said *NP*. "That's not the case with *Kid Icarus*."

What we think

There's no denying that *Kid Icarus*'s difficulty can put people off. You could use some of those cheat codes to overcome that, but we'd recommend you play the 3D Classics edition of the game now available on the 3DS e-shop, as it's a little easier.

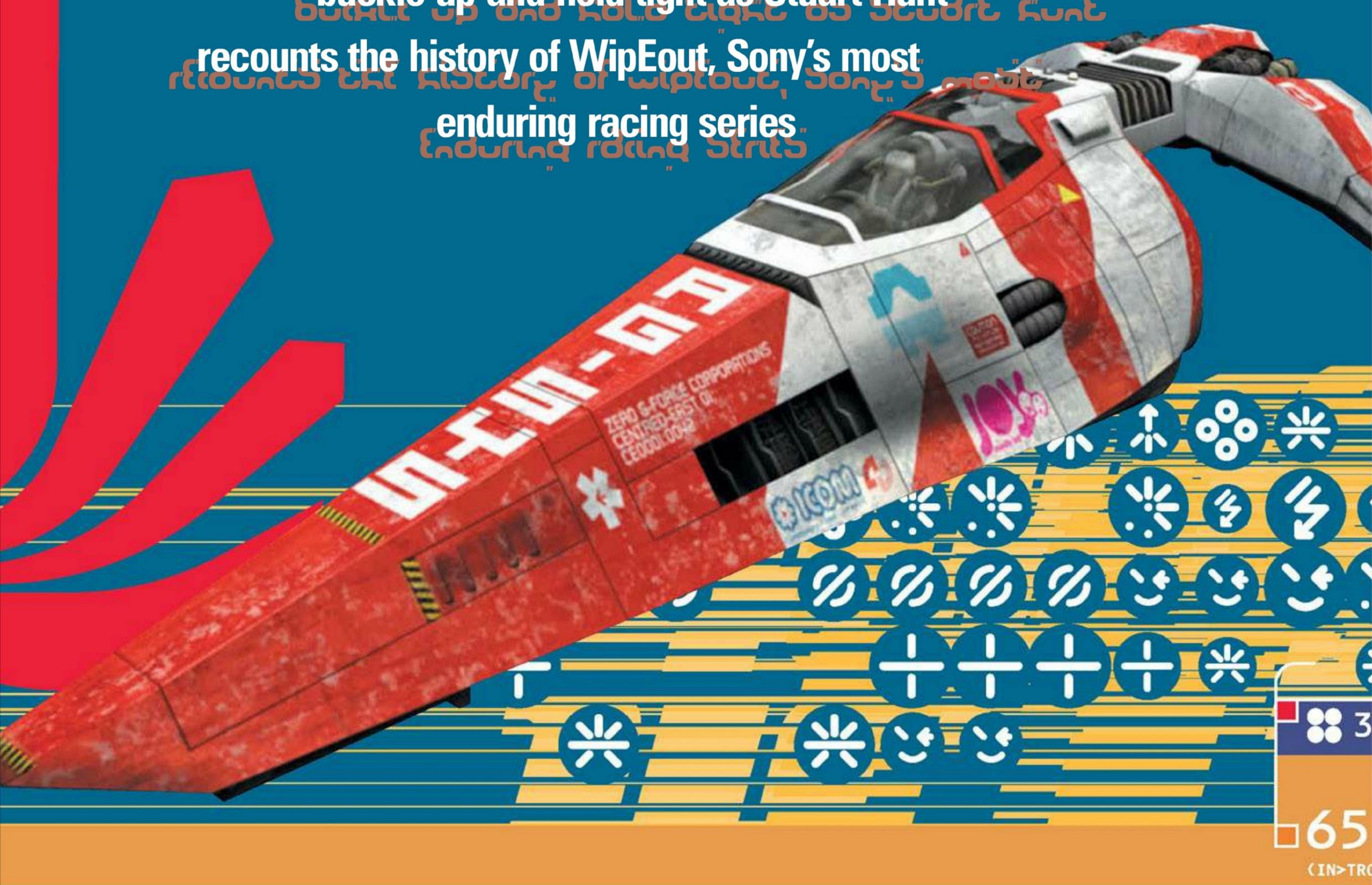
FILE UNDER: ADRENALIN RUSH

Racing By Design

Racing By Design – The Complete

Arguably the PlayStation's most iconic racing franchise, buckle up and hold tight as Stuart Hunt recounts the history of WipEout, Sony's most enduring racing series

Arguably the PlayStation's most iconic racing franchise, buckle up and hold tight as Stuart Hunt recounts the history of WipEout, Sony's most enduring racing series



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History of WipEout

The Complete History of WipEout

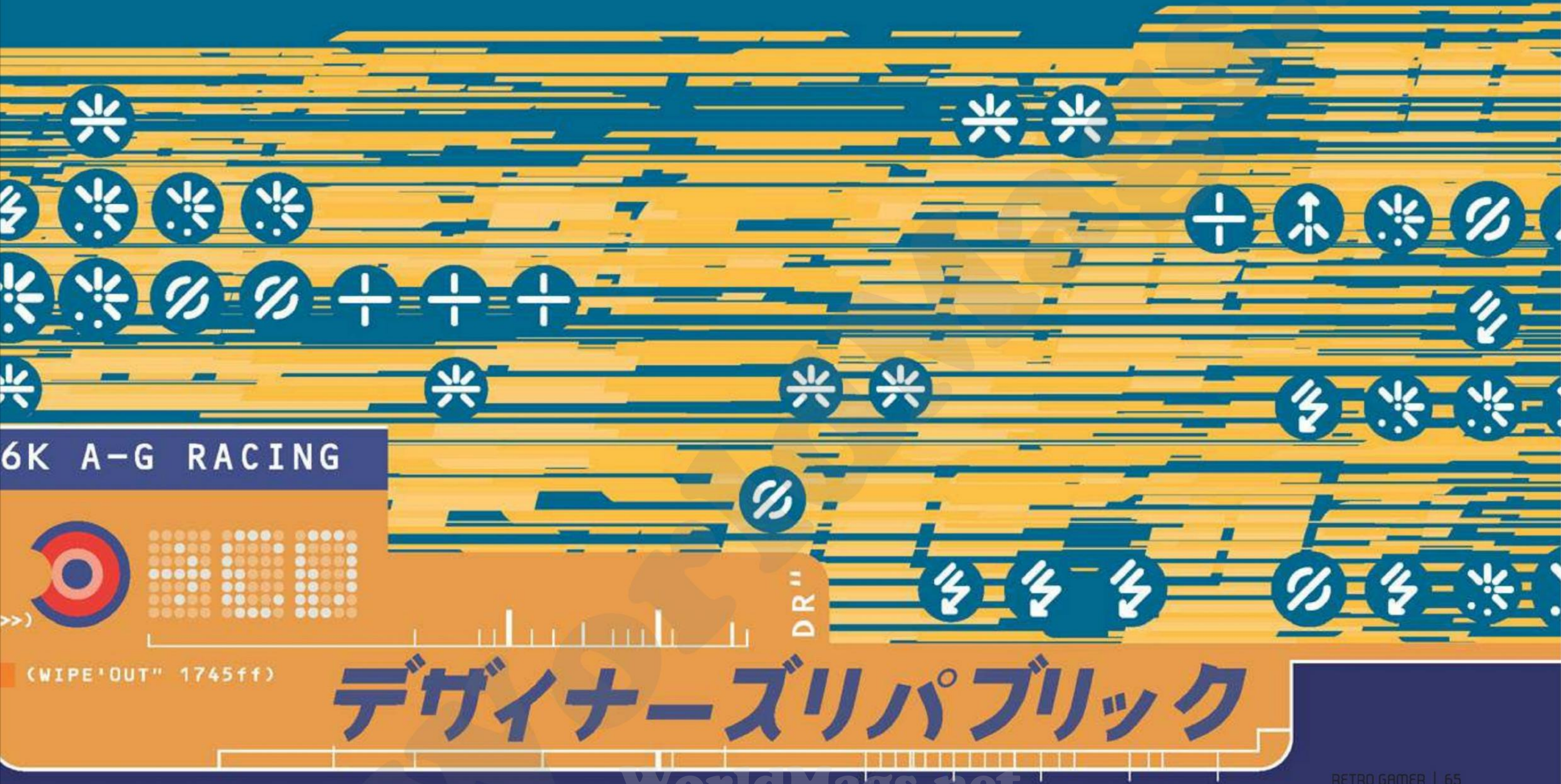
Game designer Nick Burcombe, graphic artist Jim Bowers, The Surfaris, beer, and the Amiga game *Matrix Marauders* are all to be thanked for jumpstarting *WipEout*.

After seeing an animation for *Matrix Marauders*, which artist Jim Bowers was working on, showing two *WipEout*-style ships from the game racing each other, Nick was hit with the inspiration to create a futuristic racing game. The two men got together and fleshed out the idea between gulps of ale and excitable chitchat in their local pub, and came up with a title inspired by The Surfaris' hit song *Wipe Out*. An enthusiastic Jim got to work on creating a concept demo, soon taking the idea to his colleagues at Psygnosis. *WipEout* was quickly thrust into production, with Nick as lead designer.

As well as *Matrix Marauders*, many other games would influence *WipEout*'s design, including *F-Zero*, Michael Powell's 3D futuristic racer *Powerdrome* and Psygnosis' *Infestation*. But, as Nick revealed in our making of *WipEout* feature in issue 35, it was *Super Mario Kart*'s battle-themed racing antics that provided the largest portion of the roadmap that *WipEout* would follow. As work progressed, the small team of ten faced a tight deadline. It was a schedule made even tighter when well into production it was decided that the code should be restarted from scratch. Despite the interruption, the team, which was comprised mostly of artists, still completed the game in 14 months.

Considering its strong artistic direction, it doesn't seem surprising that the ratio of artists to designers was so high with *WipEout*. Of course, Psygnosis wasn't entirely responsible for coming up with *WipEout*'s strong aesthetic, as it would enlist the help of acclaimed graphic design studio The Designers Republic (tDR) to sharpen its vision for the game.

Originally hired just to design *WipEout*'s box art, tDR went on to have a bigger role in its development after key artist Lee Carus (now art director for Sony's Studio Liverpool) spotted a fax from the company and liked the design of the company's header. Splashing it across the side of one of *WipEout*'s ships in the game's intro to see how it looked, he and the team were in agreement that it suited *WipEout* perfectly. From





» [PlayStation] *WipEout 2097* was a great follow-up that ironed out many of the gripes fans had with *WipEout*. The difficulty was smoothed out and the handling improved.

that moment, as Carus tells it, "tDR became more heavily involved."

Of course, a futuristic racing game needed a fitting soundtrack, and for this the team hit all the right notes. A mixture of well-known and up-and-coming dance and electronic artists contributed music to its soundtrack, including the likes of Orbital and Leftfield. Any gaps were filled in with a collection of brilliant compositions by acclaimed Psygnosis musician Tim Wright (aka CoLD SToRAGE).

While today licensed high-quality music tracks can be heard in everything from *FIFA* to *Tony Hawk's*, at the time of *WipEout*'s development the games industry's relationship with the music business was still very much in its infancy. *WipEout*'s success, and also that of the popular CD soundtrack that sprung from it, proved the two industries could be mutually beneficial to one another. Kids purchase both videogames and music, and so a good game can offer musicians a captive audience. Similarly, a videogame, particularly a racing game, could be enhanced with a banging soundtrack.

Released in 1995, *WipEout* is notable for being the first non-Japanese game released for the PlayStation. It was also a launch game for the machine in Europe, sharing shelves with the likes of *Rapid Reload, Jumping Flash!, Battle Arena Toshinden* and Namco's anticipated *Ridge Racer* home conversion. *WipEout*'s combat racing and sci-fi setting worked in its favour. Indeed, had it been a 'pure' racer, it may well have been forced to inhale Namco's dust come launch.

But *WipEout* was very much a game for its time, and this was also a contributing factor to the success it enjoyed. Its appearance on an exciting new 32-bit console and the popular club and dance culture of the period undoubtedly helped push WipEout to the huge popularity and success it saw, further assisted by a canny marketing campaign that saw PlayStation booths installed in nightclubs all across the country. *WipEout,* of course, was a perfect dance partner.

WipEout take 2097

Though *Wipeout* was certainly a strong debut for a new racing franchise, and an appropriate showcase for the PlayStation's audio and visual capabilities, it wasn't perfect. Its sensitive steering mechanics and punishing collision detection, which caused your ship to stop dead in its tracks, combined to make a pretty unforgiving racer, particularly on later circuits.

This was something that didn't go unnoticed by the team when creating the sequel, *WipEout 2097* (aka *WipEout XL*). "The original *WipEout* was very punishing on the user," says Studio Liverpool's Graeme Ankers, game director for *WipEout 2048*. "On *2097,* Stewart Sockett did a great job working with the designers to improve the wing-tip collisions, and irritating weapons were removed – this really opened the game up and the additional speed classes made the game a little more accessible and a lot more skill-based at faster (Phantom) speeds."

But there was one other way the team sought to improve the experience. In the original, a lot of the weapons and power-ups could almost be regarded as *Mario Kart* equals: Mines were essentially Bananas, Rockets were Green Shells, and Missiles were Red Shells. For *WipEout 2097*, as Graeme explains, this was addressed by adding more imaginative weapons.

"All of the weapons were revisited on 2097. Rockets were beefed up, rear-firing missiles were added, and the plasma bolt, minigun (only accessible as a cheat) and quake were added by Chris Roberts, who was working on the weapons at the time. Quake was quite an obvious one because the track has such a simple structure on PS1 it was easy to manipulate the geometry to produce the quake effect, so the idea came from the way the track was made rather than from any specific design."

Offering a more creative array of weapons, dropping any that proved unpopular and improving those that were well loved, *2097* enhanced both sides of *WipEout*'s core gameplay. And to complement the refined weaponry, and give each a sense of unique worth, crafts were fitted with destructible shields and could be eliminated from races. Of course, this also worked against players as they had to be conscious of their own craft taking too much damage and being retired from the race. This was offset somewhat by the inclusion of pit stops, which allowed players to replenish shields but at the cost of losing time.

For *2097*'s design, Psygnosis reteamed with tDR, and the success of the first title meant that soundtrack contributions came from more revered dance artists, including The Prodigy, and The Chemical Brothers. As a result of the popular changes, tweaks and refinements made, *2097* is regarded as the pinnacle of the series by many fans. It certainly marks the moment the franchise



Work Buy Play Die Reborn



The Designers Republic was responsible for *WipEout*'s strong design direction, and as such it could be argued it was as much a contributor to the franchises' success as Psygnosis. Based in Sheffield, tDR was established by Ian Anderson in 1986 to originally design posters for a band he was managing. The studio's success grew, particularly in the Nineties, though its strong brand of graphic design, which combined ironic messages and hyper-consumerism with minimalist and constructivist art influences. It brought tDR to the attention of large corporations such as Coca-Cola and Adidas as well as notable British bands including Supergrass and Pulp. In the field of games, tDR has also worked with the likes of Gremlin Interactive, DMA/Rockstar Games and Electronic Arts.

But its most notable collaboration was with Psygnosis on the *WipEout* series, which came about after tDR was hired to design the box art for the first game and then invited to have a lot more creative input. Despite its success in 2009 tDR was forced to close its doors. Speaking to *Creative Review* in January 2009, Anderson explained that the company had become insolvent due to a number of factors, but said tDR 'would go forward'. The studio has since been connected with a number of design projects for Warp Records.



» [PlayStation] *WipEout* was a fantastic showcase for Sony's grey box, and embraced the club and dance culture of the time.

The Chronology of WipEout



» [PS Vita] The franchise has always served to show off the power and function of the machine it's running on, it's particularly evident in *WipEout 2048*.

edged from *Super Mario Kart*'s slipstream, found its own identity and became an iconic racing franchise in its own right.

A sign of how popular the series had become, Psygnosis worked on an exclusive *WipEout* sequel for the N64. It was essentially a meshing of *WipEout* and *WipEout 2097*, featuring slightly tweaked mirrored tracks from those two games, but dressing them up in new names and locations. *WipEout 64* also marked the series debut for split-screen multiplayer and the popular Challenge Mode, which allowed players to compete in three different event classes which comprised: Race (place high), Battle (destroy rival racers) and Time Trial (finish in the fastest time).

Less is more

The next PlayStation instalment was *Wip3out*, released elsewhere originally as *WipEout 3*, though it was also re-released as *WipEout 3* in 2000. Its original European box art is telling of Psygnosis' and tDR's intent for the look and design of the game. The cover image depicts a white stretch of track with the anti-grav crafts distinguishable only by a few coloured shapes. At a quick glance, it seems like nothing more than a nice bit of minimalist artwork, until you take a closer look.

A similar thing can be said of the game itself. Marking the last PlayStation instalment in the series, *Wip3out* was another high-scoring entry, but was criticised for not breaking new ground, something Graeme feels was undeserved. "*Wip3out* criticism is never merited. With each

A timeline of WipEout's anti-gravity racing leagues



WipEout 2048
Takes place: 2048
AG racing league: ARGC 1st season
Number of teams: 5

WipEout
Takes place: 2052
AG racing league: F3600
Number of teams: 4

WipEout 2097
Takes place: 2097
AG racing league: F5000
Number of teams: 4

WipEout 64
Takes place: 2098
AG racing league: F5000
Number of teams: 5

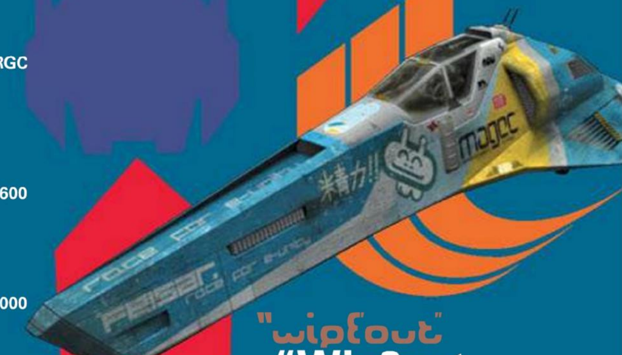
Wip3out
Takes place: 2116
AG racing league: F7200
Number of teams: 8

WipEout Fusion
Takes place: 2160
AG racing league: F9000
Number of teams: 8

WipEout Pure
Takes place: 2197
AG racing league: FX300
Number of teams: 8

WipEout HD
Takes place: 2205
AG racing league: FX350
Number of teams: 12

WipEout Pulse
Takes place: 2207
AG racing league: FX400
Number of teams: 12



"Wip3out looks like nothing more than a nice bit of minimalist artwork, until you take a closer look"





» [PlayStation 2] The team attempted something different with *Fusion*, widening the tracks and making them noticeably more elaborate than previous iterations.



» [PlayStation] As well as the PlayStation, *WipEout* also graced the Sega Saturn and PC. The Saturn version (released in 1996) is slightly smoother than the PS version, but lacks particle effects.

new iteration comes a desire from the team to take it to the next level. In the case of *Wip3out*, Nicky Westcott got control and it was the first title out of the new Leeds Studio.

"They were very design oriented and wanted to break it down to its most minimal. The relationship with The Designers Republic was at its height and Mike from The Designers Republic loves to keep things simple. It was a bold approach considering CG was still maturing – everyone was trying to go brighter and bolder – they took a step back and gave us pure design, which worked well given the systems constraints. You couldn't get anything more from the PS1 – so why try? Rather than try anything obvious and new, they stripped it back to what they thought *WipEout* was all about."

Wip3out, despite an erratic difficulty spike, marked another jump up in the quality of the series, although admittedly not as dramatic a leap as with *2097*. *Wip3out* introduced a number of ideas that even elevated it above *2097* in some ways. The most noticeable of which being its visuals; as Greg points out, the approach taken by tDR and the in-house design team was to keep things simple. The teams, realising they would struggle to squeeze any more visual grunt from the PS1 therefore decided to embellish the strong design philosophy of the original, resulting in arguably the best-looking episode in the PlayStation trilogy. It was also one of the few PlayStation games that could be enjoyed in glorious high-definition.

In addition to a few new weapons – notably the Energy Drain and Forcewall – a second speed boost ability was added. Accessible at any point during a race by spending your craft's shield reserve, it provided a fantastic risk-and-reward mechanic. *Wip3out* featured the popular Challenge Mode from *WipEout 64*, and also introduced Eliminator, a last-one-standing deathmatch that could be played by either two players over split-screen, or, by using a cheat, four-players via link-up using a single disc. *2097* supported link-up mode, but required players have two copies of the game. *Wip3out* also marks the final *WipEout* game to have creative input from tDR.

"We exploit everything, and we're not just ticking boxes, we do it in a way that's right for our game"

A different direction

When Sony announced its successor to the PlayStation, a *WipEout* title on the console was a given. During the interim period between the release of *Wip3out* and the PS2, Psygnosis, which was purchased by Sony prior to the launch of the PlayStation, was renamed SCE Studio Liverpool and the Psygnosis name and Roger Dean's iconic barn owl were both retired.

WipEout Fusion marked a noticeable shift in the series. Good Design was brought in to create the in-game advertisements and menus in the game, and there was a bigger emphasis on weapon use too. Ship upgrades made their first appearance, tracks were noticeably wider and free-form sections added. Arguably the most popular new addition was Zone Mode, which saw players holding their nerve in a tense endurance race in which their craft would gradually increase in speed with each lap.

"We wanted to make new game modes that kept you hypnotised by the game and were super quick – something that you needed to play without wasting time blinking!" Graeme explains, when we ask him where the idea for the mode came from. "As ever we experimented with a few ideas, but Zone Mode was clearly special. We evolved it over the years, with tweaks to the rules, new track graphics and more recently, changing tracks based on your Zone level." Sadly, despite attempts at shaking up the formula, *Fusion* wasn't as well received as previous iterations. And the disappointing reaction it received affected the team's approach to subsequent *WipEout* games.

"The team back then were quite frustrated by it. As a near launch title, it should be a given that the game is primarily a showcase for what is possible on a new platform. We tried very hard to create environments that were more than just the typical trench. The lap times were longer, the tracks more elaborate, but in many instances that wasn't judged to be a good thing. It made us step back from trying anything new with the tracks after that. Something we've rectified in *WipEout 2048,* as it happens."

Wipeortables

The second WipEout game to be a launch title for a Sony console was *WipEout Pure*, this time on the Sony PSP. This release marked the first portable iteration of the franchise so far, and would pave the way for more to come. A hypnotic experience that had previously only been designed for the big(ish) screen, we asked Graeme how difficult it was to condense *WipEout's* gameplay onto a portable.

"The simple nature of *WipEout*'s core DNA meant it translated easily to a handheld," says Graeme. "We just made sure that races didn't last too long and that we could allow the player to save regularly, to help with the 'short bursts of play' nature of a hand-held device."

And was the pressure on to get the game ready for the launch? "We decided to do a new version of *WipEout* for the launch of PSP a long time before we got any PSP development kits. We knew things like screen size, aspect ratio and roughly how powerful the PSP was going to be, so instead of waiting for kits, we started making, running and testing the game on PC.

"We played it via a DualShock 2 to PC converter, and got most of our tracks and handling sorted before the kits even arrived, so we were ahead of the game. By time the kits came in, it didn't take us long to get the game



Wipeinfluences

We examine in more detail the games said to have influenced WipEout



F-Zero

Nintendo's anti-grav racing series is perhaps *WipEout*'s biggest racing rival, owing to a comparably-sized fan base and garnering a similar level of success, though F-Zero has a comic book aesthetic, and there are no weapons to use.



Powerdrome

Michael Powell's *Powerdrome* was another big influence on WipEout, but not in the way some might think. It was seen by Burcombe as 'how not to make a *WipEout* game', referring to the games fiddly handling as being an issue.



Infestation

One of the more subtle influences is this 3D wireframe sci-fi adventure game with an *Alien*-style premise. Jim Bowers worked as graphic artist on this game as well, and there's undoubtedly a connection to be made with *WipEout*.



Matrix Marauders

Another Jim Bowers joint, *Matrix Marauders* is the spark that set *WipEout* into motion, and also influenced the ship design too. You can clearly see this in the game's intro (seen here). See, looks just like a FEISAR craft.



Super Mario Kart

***WipEout*'s combat-infused racing and randomised weapon pads were inspired by the classic SNES kart racer. *WipEout*'s lead designer Nick Burcombe was a big fan, and wanted to channel its brilliance into the game.**

running on them. We found we had to tweak a few things to tailor it more to the PSP's form factor, but there was very little wasted from the PC development that had been carried out."

WipEout Pure was an impressive showcase for Sony's new handheld, and its magazine scores reflected that. As its title implies, *Pure* marked a return to the simple, uncomplicated racing action of early *WipEout* titles; pitting was removed and the tracks made shorter and less elaborate. *Pure* was also the first in the series to feature DLC. Allowing fans to expand their game via new tracks, vehicles and artwork, it rounded off an impressive portable debut for the franchise.

This was followed up with the PSP sequel *WipEout Pulse*, which was later converted to PS2. *Pulse* can be seen as something of a fusion of past games, in that it featured many of the best modes of previous entries in the series, including the popular Eliminator and Zone Modes. Some of the notable things it added included a mirror mode, and on-rails track sections that took players around tight corners and through rollercoaster style sections without their craft bouncing around the track like R2-D2 in a magnet factory.

In this current generation there have been two releases in the franchise to date. *WipEoutHD* kicked things off and marked the first digital entry in the series. It also saw the team revisit classic tracks from *Pure* and *Pulse* and remaster them in stunning high-definition. This was perceived to be a fairly straightforward porting process by the team, but in reality required much more work than originally anticipated.

"From an art perspective we were just going to port the game assets from the PSP to the PS3, however we soon realised that when viewed in 1080p the quality of these assets didn't look good enough," Graeme explains. "Geometry, textures,



» [PlayStation] *WipEout 3* would mark the final *WipEout* game to have design partnership with The Designers Republic. The relationship lasted four years.



» [PlayStation 3] There's never been a bad *WipEout*, a testament to the team's desire to ensure each entry takes the series forward.

materials and lighting all needed their resolution and quality to be increased by around x10, often more. This led to a complete reworking of each racetrack, environment, vehicles, animation and lighting, using the original PSP version as a block-out guide. The essence of each track remained but the end result was a far richer, complex and visually stunning experience for the player."

The recently released *WipEout 2048* is the latest game in the franchise. A prequel for the franchise and a launch title for the Sony Vita, like *Pure*, it makes impressive use of the console's capabilities, taking full advantage of the machine. Over the years, the *WipEout* teams have viewed each entry in the franchise as a vehicle to really demonstrate the capability of the hardware it appears on. This has never been more evident than with *WipEout 2048*, which practically leaves no stone unturned in Vita's oversized rock garden of controls and functions.

"*WipEout* is very distinct, nothing else really looks, sounds or even plays like it. *WipEout* is always a show-piece for the hardware it's running on, regardless of what hardware that is. We always show off what can be done with a new piece of kit by utilising as much of it as we can. *WipEout 2048* uses pretty much everything the Vita can do – buttons, sticks, tilt, touch, cameras, network, near… we exploit everything, and we're not just ticking boxes, we do it in ways that are right for our game. That's why it's a show-piece for Vita."

Each new iteration of *WipEout* reveals a developer driven by both the desire to not disappoint fans and also to build on past games. But its strong design direction and blend of combat and racing may have been both a blessing and a curse. As each new instalment looks and feels similar, so the subtle tweaks and refinements to the formula are most visible to and therefore appreciated by hardcore fans. The series is, however, one of Sony's most enduring racing franchises and is still arguably the best future racing series out there.

Lemmings 2: The Tribes

DMA DESIGN DOES THE TRIBAL DANCE

» RETROREVIVAL



» DMA DESIGN
» PC
» 1993

Sequels are tricky games to get right. Make them too similar to the previous outing and gamers get annoyed with the lack of originality in them. Conversely, make them too different and you dare to alienate the very audience that loved your game in the first place.

DMA Design's first proper *Lemmings* sequel cleverly appealed to both parties by delivering interesting twists on the original game, which set the world alight when it was first released in 1991.

The core gameplay of *Lemmings 2* remained identical to the original game, meaning you had to guide your lemmings to the available exit as quickly as possible. The structure, however, was far better thanks to the new tribes that had been introduced, which formed after the lemmings from the original game reached Lemming Island and split off into factions.

Lemmings 2: The Tribes featured 12 tribes, all with their own distinctive attributes (making 52 different lemmings in total) which offered far more flexibility when completing *Lemmings 2's* 120 levels. While you had to complete each level before you could progress to the next, the 12 available tribes, which could be selected at will – and handily accessed by a world map – meant that you would never hit the walls of difficulty that could often be found in the original game. You'd simply try another tribe instead, furthering the accessibility of DMA Design's sequel.

The lemmings themselves added greatly to *The Tribes* and, while several of them were little more than offshoots of the original creatures, many did change the core dynamics massively, further improving the way you approached and completed each stage.

Neat touches also existed, like the new fan icon that could push wayward lemmings, the handy fast-forward button, or the fact that each tribe started with 60 lemmings and surviving ones would be carried over to the next level, which affected your final overall rating.

While *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* may have used the same core gameplay mechanics as the original, the addition of the tribes and new lemmings greatly enhanced the overall experience. It was also released on several different systems, meaning it shouldn't be hard to track down a copy of this excellent sequel.




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FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Salamander SOFTWARE

Thirty years on, Richard Hewison talks to Eighties publisher and 8-bit developer Salamander Software about big plastic boxes, Dan Diamond text adventures, Jeff Minter conversions, sartorial sense, and supporting the Dragon 32, the 48k Oric-1, the MSX and the BBC Micro

At the height of its popularity in the early Eighties, Brighton-based Salamander Software competed with the prolific Microdeal to be the number one developer and publisher of software for the Dragon 32 in the UK. Co-founder Dr Paul Kuczora recalls how it all began.

"Salamander really started at my friends Pete Neale and Lucy Parker's house in '82. It was the usual case of us all looking at what else was out there and saying 'We can do better than that!'" Paul had begun writing software for the BBC Micro earlier that year. His friend Jul Carson had recently earned a Degree in Experimental Psychology at Sussex University and had a keen interest in design, leading to his acceptance into Brighton College of Art after working as a cartoonist. It was around this time that Paul approached Jul.

"Paul asked me to design a logo for a company he was setting up to publish computer games," says Jul. "The name Salamander Software was suggested by my partner at the time," adds Paul. "We were looking for an alliterative name and the only other one we came up with was Southern Software!"

Pete's Dragon

To become a games software publisher, Salamander obviously needed some games to publish. Paul had already written *Tanks!* for the BBC Model B, but finding more became a priority. Help came in the form of Pete Neale, who had come to the UK from Texas to study at Sussex University and ended up staying, working as a mainframe programmer. He had met Paul a few times at University, but got to know him better after graduation, through Pete's future wife Lucy Parker, who was a fellow Alumnus.

Paul was very keen to enlist Pete and had learned that Pete was considering buying a home computer. In what was effectively an ambush, Paul turned up outside the shop in Brighton whilst Pete was perusing inside.

"I went in possibly looking to buy a computer," explains Pete. "I ran into Paul and he suggested I get a Dragon. I thought he just happened to be there but I learned later that it might just have been a conspiracy between Paul, Jul and Lucy!

"Jul had actually approached me a couple of months before, saying that he and Paul thought there might be a business there [selling games software] and asked me for some advice. I said 'maybe' because I was in full-time employment and wasn't interested until after I bought a Dragon and saw the possibilities for myself."

Pete's first task for Salamander was to write a version of the classic *Star Trek* tactical game for the Dragon. Renamed *Dragon Trek* to pre-empt any potential legal problems, it became one of Salamander's launch titles and best sellers.

"I'd been doing computing at High School since the early Seventies when the University of Texas decided to experiment on a group of teenage students to see if we could cope with the idea of computing, which just shows you how things have changed!" says Pete, with a smile. "I played the original teletype version of *Star Trek* where you issued commands and it gave you printed one line responses because it didn't have a display!"

INSTANT EXPERT

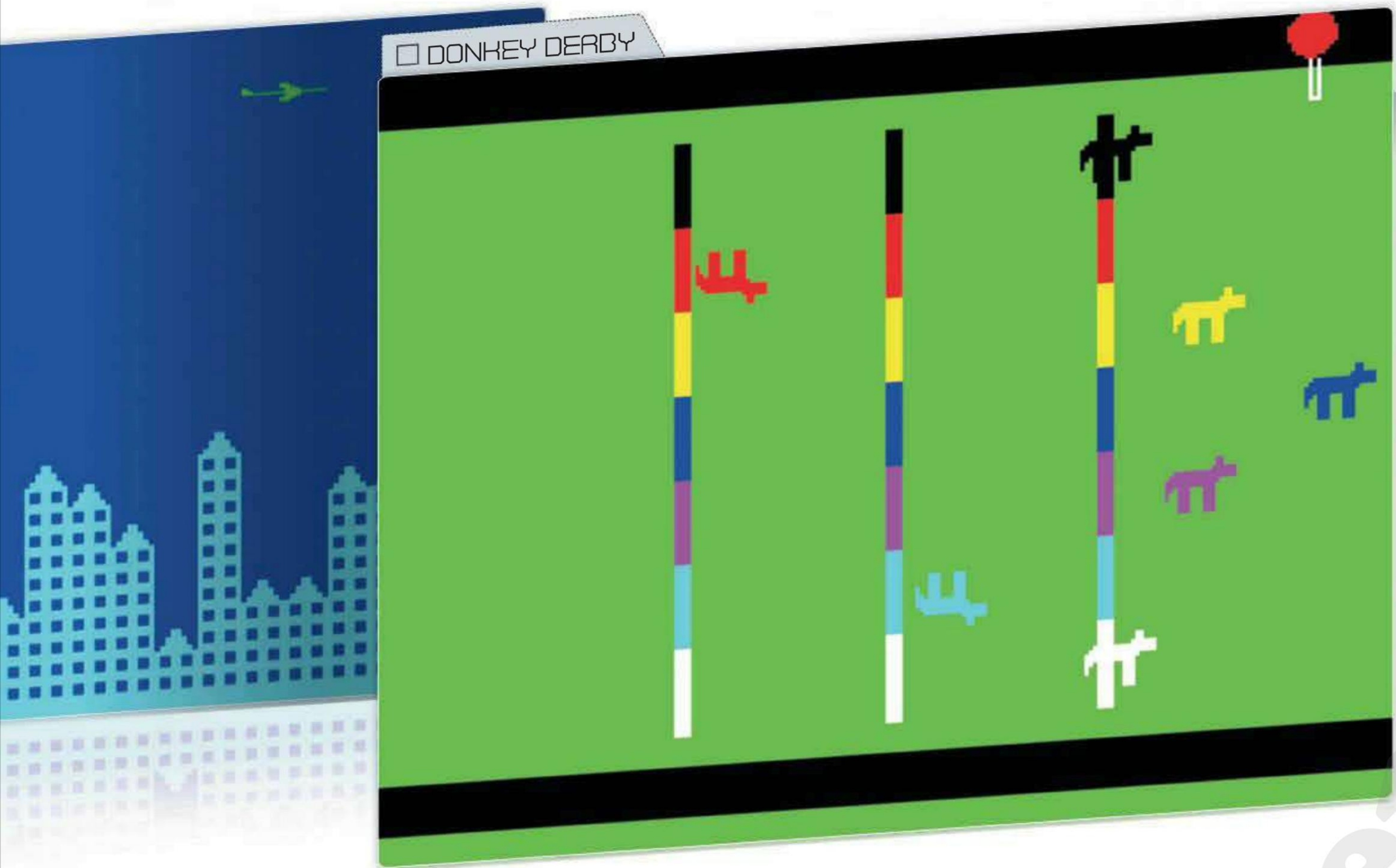
Franklin's Tomb on the BBC and Dragon 32 starts with the opening notes from Henry Mancini's famous *Pink Panther* theme.

With the exception of a few different commands, the Dragon 32 was a clone of the Tandy Color Computer. Salamander converted the majority of its titles to run on the CoCo machine with Extended Basic for sale in the US.

A number of titles were never released, including the multiplayer RPG *Castle Baron* for the Dragon 32, and Spectrum conversions of Jeff Minter's *Hovver Bovver,* the *Dan Diamond* adventures and *The Cricklewood Incident.*

***I Ching* was** the only other Spectrum title published by Salamander, written by Paul Kuczora's brother Andrew in 1983 with a cover inlay by Jul Carson.

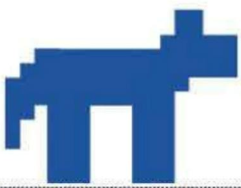
None of Salamander's releases featured screenshots anywhere on the packaging.



"The only other alliterative title we could come up with was Southern Software"

PAUL KUCZORA EXPLAINS THE ORIGIN OF THE SALAMANDER SOFTWARE NAME

Dragon Trek used the same game mechanics but added a display, and, months later, Salamander produced another improved version for the Oric-1 unsurprisingly called *Oric Trek*, which improved the visuals again.



Bigger ambitions

Salamander avoided the Limited Company route, and instead ran as a co-operative of equal partners, with each person in the group given a role that reflected their strengths and experiences.

"I'd previously been a Sales Engineer, so I became Marketing Manager. I also acted as a second-string programmer to Pete," explains Paul. In addition to his programming duties, Pete oversaw software development and wrote all of the game copy, manuals and advertisements.

"Jul and I were the Art department," says Lucy. "I was doing a BA in Illustration at Brighton College of Art but left half-way through to work for Salamander." Jul and Lucy were quickly engaged to find companies for duplication, packaging and printing. Lucy and Pete also volunteered their mid-terrace house in Brighton as a base of operations.

Various other friends and family members worked on getting Salamander Software off to a good start, including two more Sussex University Alumni in the form of Chris Holland, who took on advertising and sales on his days off before becoming a partner, and Peter Ohlson, who was drafted as Projects Director.

With the team in place, their first titles were officially launched on 14 November 1982 and it wasn't long before orders came flooding in through the letterbox, catching them a little off-guard.

"The scale we originally envisaged was quite small, selling by mail order. I don't think any of us predicted it would take off like it did!" remembers Lucy. Having spent months setting the company up and with huge initial demand, the core group all committed to Salamander by giving up their day jobs and switching to full-time employment on their new venture.

Salamander's initial releases came in small, clam-style cassette cases. However, in the early Eighties home video emerged, and many rented videos came supplied in large plastic boxes which Salamander felt they could use to their advantage in regard to having a more eye-catching design.

"Instead of normal cassette cases, we switched to modified video-tape packaging for maximum effect," says Paul. "Persuading the likes of Boots that it was worth taking up the extra shelf space was one of our major marketing achievements!" he adds proudly.

What Salamander's big boxes allowed them to do was make their titles stand out on the shelves. It also helped that Boots had already made a commitment to selling the Dragon 32 computer throughout its ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

- **3** – Salamander was in business for three years, from mid-1982 until mid-1985
- **3** – Salamander produced three versions of *737 Flight Simulator* for the BBC, Acorn Electron and MSX
- **4** – Bob Ahern had four *Dan Diamond* adventures published by Salamander
- **4** – Salamander published four *Games Compendiums* covering the Dragon, BBC and Oric-1 platforms
- **5** – Amount of published titles for the Acorn Electron
- **5** – Five Jeff Minter Spectrum conversions were written by Salamander, though distributed and marketed by Quicksilva
- **6** – Salamander published six titles for the Oric-1/Atmos
- **13** – The BBC Micro had thirteen titles published by Salamander
- **45** – The total number of unique titles that were published by Salamander
- **100** – Amount of *Fishy Business* units produced for the Oric-1/Atmos



TIMELINE

- 1982 — PAUL KUCZORA WRITES *TANKS!* FOR THE BBC MODEL B MICRO
- 1982 — PAUL ASKS JUL CARSON TO DESIGN A LOGO FOR SALAMANDER SOFTWARE
- 1982 — SALAMANDER SOFTWARE IS SET UP TO PUBLISH GAMES FOR THE BBC AND DRAGON 32



» [BBC Micro] Jul Carson's airbrushed *737 Flight Simulator* artwork.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Pete Neale
Pete returned to programming mainframes, before moving to creating websites. He is currently working as a contract programmer in Chichester, but he and Lucy still live in Brighton. He is the co-author of *The Beginner's Guide to Fixing Your PC*, coached the Sussex Thunder Junior American Football Team to three national championships, was named the BAFCA Coach of the Year 2005, and in his spare time he impersonates Santa Claus and Dogbert.

Lucy Parker
Lucy is still an artist and teacher. She is a member of the Fiveways Artist group that exhibit at the Brighton Festival. Lucy gives demonstrations in art, and has recently completed a portrait in oils in one hour for a local art group and received a standing ovation. She will also be artist-in-residence at Borde Hill Gardens in the summer.



Dr Paul Kuczora
Paul remained in IT in various technical roles, with a stint as a University Research Assistant and Research Fellow. He also worked for Celador International and ITV on the interactive *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* service. Today, Paul is a designer, developer and web-master, developing bespoke packages for property letting companies requiring online reservations.

Jul Carson
Jul kept his hand in both design and IT after Salamander, working as a graphic designer and trainer on design applications like Adobe Photoshop and Quark Xpress. He was engaged as a studio manager for a book publishing company and then as a partner in a design agency for city businesses. Jul is currently working in web site and FileMaker development.

Chris Holland
Chris left Salamander and got a job teaching 'difficult pupils' for nearly 30 years in Brighton, Hammersmith and Fulham, and finally Greenwich, before being elected NASUWT Secretary for Greenwich and NASUWT National Executive Member for Inner London.



Bob Ahern
These days Bob still works in IT, as a Project Manager in the Financial sector, specialising in finance and insurance systems.

larger stores. The high street stores were predisposed to supporting publishers like Salamander as selling the various games helped to promote the hardware. It was a great situation for Salamander to be in, not least of all because it meant that they could be artistically expressive.

"In many ways Salamander's legacy has as much to do with the packaging as with the games themselves" adds Paul, recalling the striking box art that accompanied some of Salamander's most memorable releases, including Lucy's atmospheric painting for *Franklin's Tomb* and Jul's art for the BBC game *Eagles*.

The same amount of care and attention to detail was lavished on the paraphernalia that came supplied inside the box, as Lucy remembers. "I suppose we were rather artist heavy and longed for better graphics, so we had this idea of producing manuals with visual aids for the adventure games, which was influenced by *Dungeons and Dragons*. It meant a reduced profit margin but gave our games more visual impact on the shelves."

So what were the other production challenges that Salamander faced in those early days? "Getting cassette tapes duplicated reliably!" remembers Paul. "To begin with, we used a local hi-fi shop. The first run of games saw us sitting on Pete and Lucy's floor, labelling cassettes using a John Bull printing set!"

Just a few short months later, Salamander's games were on the shelves at WH Smiths, Boots and several small independent shops across the UK, professionally duplicated in their thousands for eager gamers to pick up.

Planes, Diamonds & Llamas

Prospective and eager programmers started submitting titles to Salamander for evaluation, hoping to grab their share of the exciting new world of computer games. One title that did particularly well was *737 Flight Simulator*, written for the BBC Micro by British Airways pilot, Tony Crome, who had originally intended it to be educational.

"I approached Salamander after a recommendation from my brother, who worked for a business software company" remembers Tony. "I tried to design the program not as a 'game' but as a way of teaching and practising the radio aids that aircraft use."

Tony constantly battled with the BBC's memory limitations, a problem that many programmers faced, finding it difficult to program the runway and other features in the simulator. Once submitted, Paul Kuczora tweaked the code before publication. Tony then converted it to run on the BBC Micro's baby brother – the Acorn Electron – while Salamander produced a Dragon 32 version and later worked with Robert Maxwell's new software company Mirrorsoft on developing an MSX conversion.

"Oh, that was fun!" says Pete. "Mirrorsoft wanted *737 Flight Simulator* for the MSX so they gave us an MSX machine, but unfortunately it was Japanese so it became an interesting exercise for me to write the conversion!"



- **1982** PAUL, JUL, PETE NEALE AND LUCY PARKER SWITCH TO FULL TIME AS *TANKS!*, *DRAGON RIDERS* AND *DRAGON TREK* ARE LAUNCHED VIA MAIL ORDER
- **1983** CHRIS HOLLAND AND PETER OHLSON JOIN SALAMANDER TO COMPLETE THE PARTNERSHIP
- **1983** A DISTRIBUTION DEAL IS SIGNED WITH BOOTS TO SELL SALAMANDER GAMES IN THEIR UK STORES
- **1983** SALAMANDER ANNOUNCES TANDY COLOR COMPUTER CONVERSIONS OF THEIR DRAGON 32 GAMES
- **1983** BOB AHERN CREATES TEXT-ONLY ADVENTURE *FRANKLIN'S TOMB* FOR THE DRAGON 32
- **1983** TONY CROME'S *737 FLIGHT SIMULATOR* IS RELEASED FOR THE BBC MICRO
- **1983** SALAMANDER CONVERTS JEFF MINTER'S GAMES TO THE SPECTRUM, DISTRIBUTED BY QUICKSILVA
- **1984** SALAMANDER REDUCES NEW PRODUCTS TO CONCENTRATE ON SELLING DISCOUNTED STOCK
- **1984** PETE NEALE CONVERTS *737 FLIGHT SIMULATOR* TO THE MSX, DISTRIBUTED BY MIRRORSOFT
- **1984** PAUL KUCZORA LEAVES FOR A CAREER IN EDUCATIONAL SOFTWARE
- **1984** SALAMANDER ANNOUNCES PLANS TO MOVE TO FRANCE
- **1985** AFTER MONTHS OF PREPARATION, THE MOVE TO FRANCE IS ABANDONED
- **1985** SALAMANDER SELLS ITS REMAINING STOCK TO MICRODEAL AND CLOSES

Thanks in part to being available on four different formats, *737 Flight Simulator* was one of Salamander's best-selling titles, with royalties still coming in long after the company had ceased trading. Another title that sold particularly well was a series of text adventures featuring a detective called Dan Diamond. *Franklin's Tomb* was the first part of a trilogy of to feature the Private Eye. Bob Ahern, who was a mutual friend of many at Salamander, wrote the game in his spare time.

"I was working for a large telecommunications company," explains Bob. "One weekend, I got a call from Pete to say that he had just bought a Dragon 32, and did I want to come round and see it? I rushed round to find out what the fuss was about and was very impressed." Bob quickly bought himself a Dragon and ended up play-testing Salamander's first games.

"Playing free games was hardly a chore!" adds Bob, laughing. He started looking at what other games were available, buying a version of *Colossal Adventure* for the Dragon that turned out to be a huge let-down. Confident that he could do better, Bob started work on his own text adventure, featuring a three-way split screen display. The main area showed the location text, the inventory appeared in another and the player's text input in the third.

"It took a couple of months working during evenings and weekends before I had something to show to everyone. They loved it and the basis of *Franklin's Tomb* was born."

Franklin's Tomb was followed by *Lost in Space* and *Fishy Business*. The trilogy was available for the Dragon, and the first two parts were converted for the Oric-1 and the BBC Micro. Later on, Einsoft signed up the trilogy and sold them in one package for the Tatung Einstein.

Not quite euphoric

In 1983, British-based Tangerine Computer Systems set up a company called Oric Products International Ltd to create a home computer to rival the Sinclair Spectrum. The 16k and 48k Orics were to compete with the equivalent Spectrum models, and the range was launched simultaneously in the UK and in France.

Salamander was approached earlier that year to produce a handful of titles for the Oric-1, as Lucy recalls. "I remember going to the Oric launch with Chris Holland and one of the big backers was British Car Auctions which I thought was a bit odd at the time!"

> **"I don't think any of us predicted it would take off like it did"**
>
> LUCY PARKER DESCRIBES HOW THEY UNDERESTIMATED DEMAND FOR GAMES

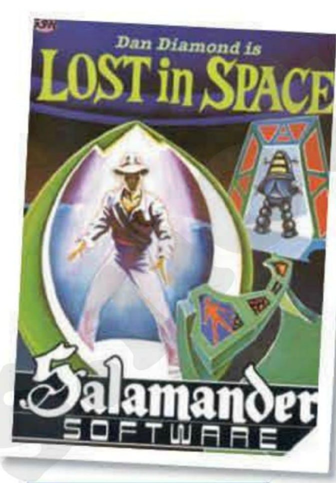
Salamander published *Oric Trek*, *Classic Racing*, the first *Dan Diamond* trilogy and a games compendium featuring four games – *Donkey Derby*, *Kingdom*, *Space Station* and *Viper*. Despite some popularity in France, the Oric-1 failed to catch on in the UK. Its failure didn't come as a big surprise to Pete Neal.

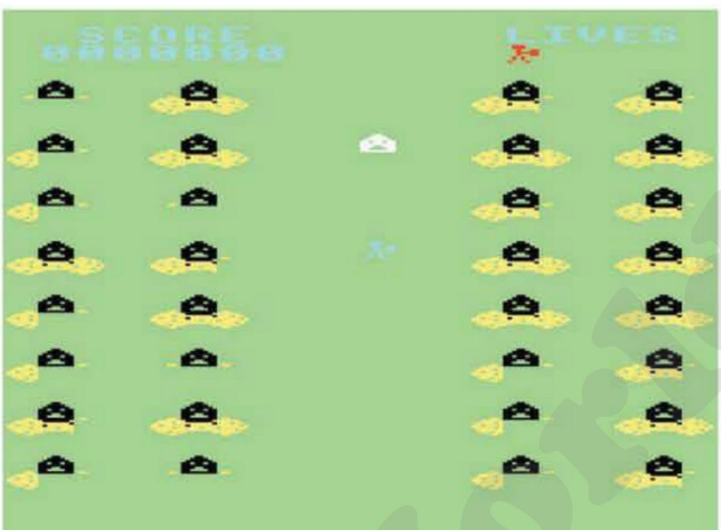
"Most people hated the keyboard so much that they wouldn't even consider it," says Pete. "The keys were long, thin and were quite hard to register when you pressed them."

Development wasn't as easy as they had hoped either. Pete says that at the time the Oric had a number of technical idiosyncrasies. Despite improved hardware the following year in the form of the Atmos, Oric never became a serious player in the UK market.

At around the same time, Salamander decided to develop for the new MSX computer. "Coming out of Japan and backed by electronic giants like Sony, Hitachi and Toshiba, how could it possibly fail?" says Paul, remembering their enthusiasm at the time.

There were rumours that Dragon were about to join the MSX consortium, so it made sense for Salamander to try entering that new market. Apart from Pete's





» [BBC Micro] *Mole* was a compilation game for the BBC based on the old carnival whack-a-mole game.



» The Salamander team in a group photo from early 1983.

THE ART OF SALAMANDER



Salamander's packaging and adverts were artistically realised by Lucy Parker and Jul Carson, who shared the creative responsibility.

"I mostly used watercolour, coloured pencils and gouache," says Lucy. "I was very influenced by comic book art and had drawn a Marvel comic as part of my art qualification. That style was rather looked down upon by Brighton Art College, but it was ideal for games covers".

"I was a big fan of pen and ink as well as airbrush," adds Jul. "I really loved the effects that could be achieved."



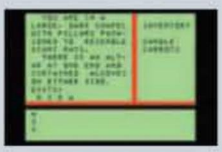


» [Dragon 32] *Vulcan Noughts and Crosses* was Salamander's second *Star Trek*-related game.

SIX OF THE BEST



737 Flight Simulator (BBC Micro) [1983]
Tony Crome's flight simulator was originally written for the BBC Model B before being converted by Tony to the Acorn Electron and by Pete Neale to the MSX. It proved to be Salamander's best selling title.



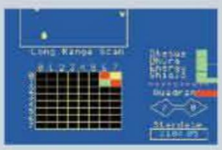
Franklin's Tomb (BBC Micro) [1983]
This challenging text-only adventure included a neat three-windowed display and paved the way for three more similar adventures featuring the private eye, Dan Diamond.



Eagles (BBC Micro) [1983]
This non-violent arcade game is a little like *Frogger* mixed with *Thrust*, where you have to quickly avoid obstacles moving in the horizontal plain whilst thrusting around the screen to retrieve pods to boost your shields. Challenging, colourful gameplay.



Wizard War (Dragon 32) [1982]
Wizard War was a fun multiplayer wizard combat game. It came with a nicely designed Spell Book, which had descriptions and illustrations explaining each of the spells in turn.



Oric Trek (Oric-1) [1983]
The Oric-1 conversion by Paul Neal bettered the Dragon 32 version with an improved, higher resolution display. You couldn't go too wrong with the gameplay, being based upon the original classic *Star Trek* mainframe game from the Seventies.



Gridrunner (Spectrum) [1983]
Whilst Salamander can't really claim this game as theirs, this Spectrum conversion of Jeff Minter's original was simple yet colourful, fast, challenging and fun to play. Good arcade mayhem!

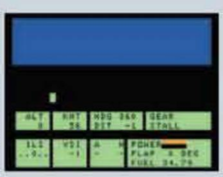
THREE TO AVOID



Grand Prix (Dragon 32) [1983]
This BASIC racing game was nothing more than a pixel going around a track, complete with a bug that allowed you to win by reversing back over the finishing line! Salamander even received a complaint from Trading Standards about it.



Everest (Dragon 32) [1983]
Everest was actually a mountain climbing simulator where you could choose between three mountains, including the eponymous Everest. Choosing climbers to take up the mountain only to watch them die randomly was not much fun!



Nightflight (Dragon 32) [1983]
Another flight simulator from Salamander, berated by some Dragon 32 owners for its lack of graphics! With the clue in the title, it comes as no surprise to learn that this simulator was specifically for night-time flights, piloting a single engine light aircraft.

MSX conversion of *737 Flight Simulator* distributed by Mirrorsoft, Paul Kuczora co-wrote a book with Christine King called *Introducing MSX Basic,* published by Microbooks in 1984. Unfortunately, by the time the MSX became available in the UK, things had already changed for the worse.

A Boot up the Eighties

Although the future was looking rosy for Salamander during 1983, over-optimism and a downturn lurked just around the corner. Retailers pre-ordered over £100,000 worth of games from Salamander in the run up to Christmas 1983, but they ultimately didn't sell as well as they were expected to. This situation wasn't unique at the time, with many retailers over-ordering after being caught short the Christmas before. When the dust had settled in early 1984, Boots wanted to return the unsold stock.

"We said to them that they should read the terms and conditions that they signed up to, because we didn't do sale or return," remembers Pete. "We said 'We'll keep the money and you keep the games. If you don't want to order from us in future then that's fine.'"

Influenza then spread through the company and by the time they had all recovered, the computer games market had fallen flat, with most UK software developers and publishers feeling the pinch as they entered 1984 in a much more cautious mood. "People were backing off from buying software after what had happened at Christmas and orders were down," says Pete.

Salamander's plans for new titles and new publishing platforms in 1984 had to be drastically reduced or completely scrapped. A new strategy was clearly required, resulting in the creation of the Salamander Software Discount Club to help sell their excess stock.

A few of the partners were beginning to think of pastures new, including co-founder Paul Kuczora, who began to see the potential in educational software after Salamander published *French Tutor* for the BBC Micro. "My interest turned to educational software and I was asked to develop some school software for the publishing firm that my partner was working for at the time," Paul says. "I had got bored with games per se, so I jumped ship and struck out on my own, and I've been a freelancer ever since!"

Salamander's other non-games related titles, including *Turtle Graphics* and a database system called *Data Retrieval System,* both for the Dragon 32. The BBC Micro got a graphics package, a programming utilities package and a turbo compiler. Unfortunately, this diversification from games made little difference to sales.

Chris Holland, recognising the warning signs, changed careers to work with 'difficult pupils' for the next few decades. His memories of working at Salamander are still good though. "It was an outstanding time, being at the beginning of computer gaming as we know it today," Chris says with some satisfaction.

The French disconnection

In late 1984, Salamander announced their intention to move the business to France. It seemed an unusual decision at the time, but it had been in the back of their minds for almost a year. Jul Carlson elaborates on exactly what they hoped to achieve.

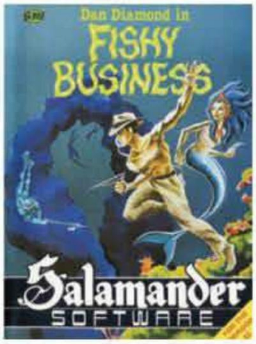
"I approached my Italian cousin to see if we could expand our market to Europe," he says. With a few contacts made, Jul and Peter Ohlson drove across France with a car full of computers, monitors and software to meet with a French businessman at his chateau. "I don't remember much about the event, except that later I found out he was nicknamed Le Requin (the shark) and that he wasn't that impressed by our titles!" adds Jul.

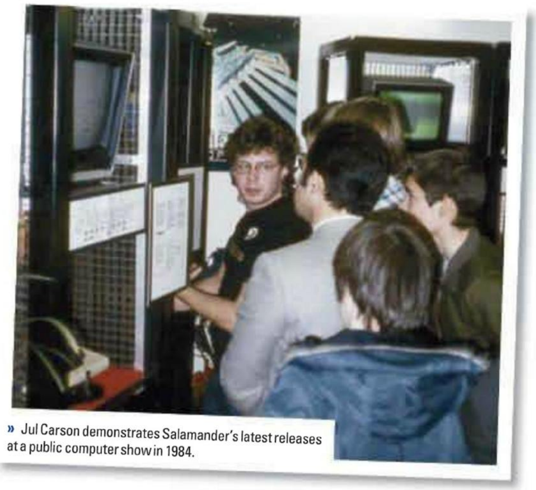
Soon afterwards, Jul's cousin put them in contact with a Parisian businessman who came over and met with Salamander on home soil in Brighton.



"This guy came over and did a business presentation to us over a day or two," remembers Pete. "He was on a different planet. He had no connection with our reality at all!" he adds, laughing. Despite







» Jul Carson demonstrates Salamander's latest releases at a public computer show in 1984.

some scepticism over their new French partner's intentions, the plan proceeded. Jul moved to Cergy Pontoise, NW of Paris where their new French office was located, and he spent some time translating code and coming up with marketing plans, while their French business partner talked to his contacts and distributors.

After several months, none of the plans had been put into action and Jul discovered that there was a block on international calls from the office, so he couldn't easily talk to anyone back in the UK, which he needed to do regularly.

"In retrospect, we worked out that our new French business partner wanted a bigger cut than what we had agreed. Eventually we pulled the plug completely and I returned to the UK without any titles actually being marketed in France."

The previous autumn, Salamander announced that a couple of new text adventure games for the Dragon were due for release. *The White Cliffs of Dover* was a follow-up to *The Wings of War*. The second new game was *Franklin In Wonderland*. The influence for the fourth *Dan Diamond* adventure was obvious from the title, as Bob elaborates. "I've always had a soft spot for *Alice In Wonderland* and I couldn't resist choosing that theme for the next adventure. It took ideas from the *Wonderland* and *Looking Glass* books."

Despite the announcement, neither title got a full commercial release. Instead, Salamander revealed in early 1985 that they would only be available via mail order for five pounds."Salamander was having problems so *Franklin in Wonderland* was sold to the die-hard *Dan Diamond* fans, but without the usual packaging and marketing," says Bob.

"We couldn't see how we'd sell enough copies [of either game] to make the effort worthwhile" says Pete matter-of-factly, as Lucy agrees.

"The company was circling the drain at the time," she says. With the planned European move scuppered and very little new product, it was time to call it a day.

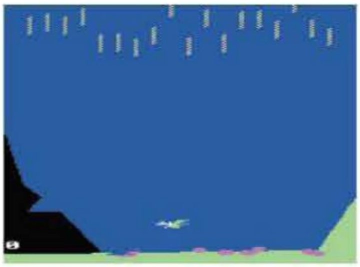
"We still had some stock, so we approached Microdeal to see if they would take it off our hands," remembers Pete. Microdeal agreed, so the last physical remnants of Salamander's stock of Dragon software was packed into a rented two-ton Luton truck ready for the journey from Brighton to St Austell in Cornwall.

"I remember driving to Microdeal and it taking forever to get across Bodmin Moor because we could only do 20 miles an hour in the truck!" says Lucy.

Whilst they did get some money for the stock, Salamander's business affairs still needed attention. Because they weren't a Limited company, the remaining debts had to be paid out of the partner's own pockets. Surprisingly, Pete is quite philosophical about how things happened, despite the pressures that must have been mounting on them at the time.

"When various partners dropped out we let them go free and clear because we didn't want to saddle people with debts," recalls Pete, who is keen to point out that they ran a tight ship. "We didn't really have many debts other than the final tax bill. I don't even think we had an overdraft anymore at that stage."

With the remaining partners each contributing to help pay the taxman and wind the company down, it was finally time to move on. After a great few years, Salamander Software was no more.



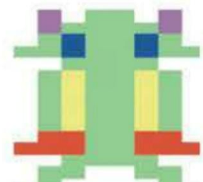
» [BBC Micro] Ironically, *Dragon Rider* wasn't published for the Dragon 32 and was only available on the BBC Micro.



» [Spectrum] *Metagalactic Llamas* was another solid Jeff Minter blaster converted by Salamander.

"It was the beginning of computer gaming as we know it today"

CHRIS HOLLAND REMEMBERS THE START OF THE SOFTWARE INDUSTRY



A JUST AWARD?



Salamander was chosen for an industry award in December 1983. The event was jointly organised by Quicksilva and Bug Byte and was held in the Grand Ballroom of the prestigious Hilton International Hotel in London.

"Pete, Chris and I went to the ceremony," remembers Lucy. "It was dead posh. There was Pete in his hat, Chris in a second-hand Guards jacket and his hair dyed to look like a skunk. He was going for the Dr Strange look with distinguished side burns, but I don't think the hairdresser understood! Mind you, I was wearing a second-hand black velvet theatrical dress with my Biba boots that were ten years old at the time!"

The Clive award they won that night was for the worst dressed people in the software industry. It was presented to Salamander by former ITN News reader Reginald Bosanquet.

"I was mortified!" says Lucy. "They said we covered ourselves with glue and then ran through an Oxfam shop!"

Although it was the first ever games industry awards ceremony in the UK, the whole event was really Quicksilva and Bug Byte having some fun. The Clive award itself looked like a BAFTA crossed with a bust of Sir Clive Sinclair.

Being the big fish

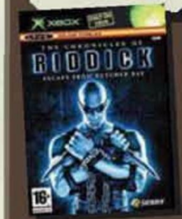
To an outsider, supporting the more commercially sound Sinclair Spectrum and Commodore 64 machines would probably have seemed like the more sensible option for a new company. However, Pete Neal doesn't see it like that.

"We wanted to start our own company and we would have been on a hiding to nothing if we'd gone into the Commodore and Spectrum markets because they were already well established by the time we came about," explains Pete. "Also, a lot of our games were written in BASIC whereas the Spectrum and the Commodore were assembler coded because the games needed fast graphics, which we didn't need for most of our games."

So was Salamander's early success with the Dragon 32 and the BBC Micro a case of 'better to be a big fish in a small pool'? "That was our feeling at the time," answers Pete. "The Dragon was a pretty good machine and so was the BBC. They both had a lot to recommend them, but they were also very expensive [to buy] so they had trouble making inroads against the likes of the Spectrum."

What does Pete think now of Salamander Software? Was creating and running the company a worthwhile endeavour? "Absolutely! I'm proud of most of the games we produced," says Pete, reflecting on the variety of Salamander's games. "There were a few real lemons, though! There was a flight simulator called *Night Flight* which was written in BASIC and some people complained because it didn't have any whizzy graphics, but neither did *737 Flight Simulator* and that was a stonking success!"

Future Classic





Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



INFO

- **Featured System:** Xbox
- **Year Released:** 2004
- **Publisher:** Sierra/Vivendi
- **Developer:** Starbreeze Studios
- **Key People:** Lars Johansson (producer), Fredrick Ljungdahl, Jens Andserson (lead game designers)

GO DEEPER

- ***Pitch Black* and *The Chronicles Of Riddick* director/writer David Twohy contributed to the story.**
- **Only two actors from the films made it into the game: Vin Diesel himself, and *Pitch Black*'s Cole Hauser.**

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

21.

In the universe's darkest jail, players took on the role of Richard B Riddick in a slow-burning and desperate breakout. We revisit Starbreeze's intelligent twist on the first-person shooter formula

THE BACKGROUND

Escape From Butcher Bay had a turbulent development, starting out as a game based on the 2000 film *Pitch Black* before evolving into a tie-in for the 2004 follow-up. This allowed it to have a two-year production cycle, which was especially unusual given that licenced games were ordinarily churned out in less than a year at the time. Times were tough at Swedish developer Starbreeze during the making of *Riddick*. The studio shrank from 80 to 25 people throughout *Butcher Bay*'s beta, and most elements of the game didn't come together until later into development. Vivendi even tried to cancel the title at one point, but immense pressure from Universal kept it in production.

Vin Diesel and his studio Tigon got heavily involved as well. Diesel told DVD Talk in 2004 that it was a "much less expensive way to play and be creative" in expanding the universe introduced by *Pitch Black*.

For Starbreeze, the developer needed the project, and it helped that the staff saw promise in the *Riddick* universe. "When we are evaluating a licence deal, we are looking for potentially interesting gameplay mechanics inherent in the key character and the world," former Starbreeze CEO Johan Kristiansson told **360 Magazine** in 2009. "In *Riddick* we liked things like the Eyeshine." It was the creative ingenuity at Starbreeze, however, that made it great. "A strong licence can be one component in making a successful game, but it is certainly not the only one."

THE GAME

In all honesty, it would be a little generous to the *Riddick* 'franchise' to say that Starbreeze owed the game's critical and commercial success to the licence – in fact, after a mass exodus at the Swedish developer in 2009, *Butcher Bay* designer Jerk Gustafsson deemed *The Chronicles Of Riddick* "shitty IP", a judgement that we'd have to agree with. It's a testament to the talent of Starbreeze, however, that it produced a first-person shooter built on unique ideas in spite of being based on a property that is entirely derivative of other films; *Riddick* is a brutal, bleak and labyrinthine experience that uses the tunnel-based level design of its genre to make the player feel confined and helpless.

Escape From Butcher Bay sees Richard B Riddick trapped in a high-security prison with the intention of escape. One of *Butcher Bay*'s most effective plot devices is the way it leads you to believe

Things of note







Riddick's resurrection

A commercially suicidal remake of *Riddick* was released in 2009, coupled to a dull new chapter called *Assault On Dark Athena*. It's the definitive version of the game.

Diesel-powered

Featuring the likeness and voice of Vin Diesel, *Riddick*, in some ways, is a product of a time when the actor was hot property. Today, his dialogue of growls comes across as a bit daft.

Failed chronicles

Butcher Bay felt authentic to the *Riddick* universe, though it has much more in common, thematically, with *Pitch Black*, as that's the licence Starbreeze started with.

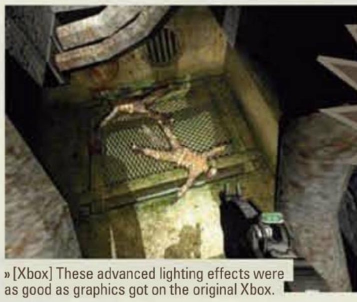
PS2 butchered

A PS2 version of *Riddick* was well into development at one point, but was sadly canned in the same sequence of events at Vivendi that almost saw it cancelled altogether.

Spiritual successor

Based on another dodgy licence, Starbreeze's 2007 FPS *The Darkness* retained Riddick's emphasis on light and dark and its side-quest-heavy structure. We heartily recommend it.


» [Xbox] Actually having a gun in your hands is a rarity in *Riddick* – it's nice not to always fight riot guards with a screwdriver.


» [Xbox] These advanced lighting effects were as good as graphics got on the original Xbox.



What the press thought

games™
Score: 8/10
"Sets a new standard for not only visuals but also licenced games in general. And we never thought we'd hear ourselves saying that."



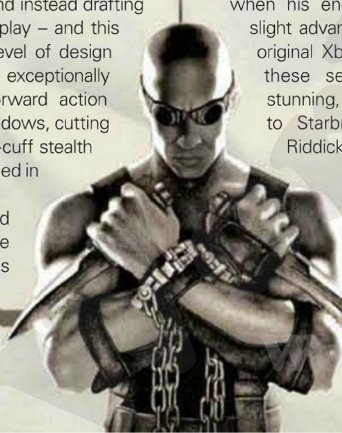
XBM
Score: 9/10
"We think you'll agree, it's breathtaking."

you've nearly escaped the prison you're in, only to find yourself in another, much harsher level of the complex – and then again, on to Butcher Bay's 'triple-max' nightmare even later in the game. There appears to be no way out, no matter what kind of deals Riddick strikes with the other inmates, who he shivs to death or which new paths emerge; in terms of atmosphere, the hopeless scenario is a perfect match for Riddick's mix of gameplay styles.

Without a gigantic armoury, players need to gather smaller weapons and make the best of it. Most of the weapons carried by guards are ID-tagged, so wielding them is impossible, shunning the conventional FPS template and instead drafting in a more tactical style of gameplay – and this is where Starbreeze's unusual level of design ingenuity comes in. Riddick is exceptionally difficult to play as a straightforward action game. Instead, sticking to the shadows, cutting the lights and performing off-the-cuff stealth kills is often the only way to succeed in certain areas.

Yet repeating the same method twice rarely works: there are dozens of different combinations of enemies and level layouts in *Butcher Bay*, and many of them demand the player rethinks his or her tactics every five minutes. In one memorably hard scenario, when Riddick ventures gunless into the guard-infested mines beneath the prison, the best tactic is actually just to run; accepting that your armoury of a club, screwdriver and knuckle dusters stand little chance in the face of assault rifle fire and mechs is a fundamental part of besting *Escape From Butcher Bay*.

The use of light and dark also caught the attention of critics and players – early on, Riddick gains the 'Eyeshine' ability, enabling him to see in the dark when his enemies can not, and giving him a slight advantage in combat encounters. For an original Xbox game, the lighting that brought these sequences to life was absolutely stunning, an impressive fusion of mechanics to Starbreeze's technical aptitude. While Riddick was revolutionary in this sense, the title was also noted at the time for primarily being a first-person beat-'em-up, of sorts, and capturing the bloody essence of a bareknuckle brawl from that perspective.



WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Starbreeze developed a tie-in that should be remembered long after the films that inspired it in the first place are forgotten. *Escape From Butcher Bay* surprised players by going in the opposite direction to the FPS titles of the time, forsaking spectacle for tension and swapping well-worn shooting mechanics for raw hand-to-hand combat, which suits the beautifully-realised sci-fi prison environment surrounding Riddick.

The sense of progression in *Butcher Bay* is perhaps most impressive, though; the way the facility sucks you into its horrible depths and introduces you to the backstabbing inmates that reside there. Riddick has to resort to anything to get the job done, beating people to death, poisoning them, and going on a rampage in a mech just to get out. Most action games feature arbitrary tasks; every action has a purpose in Riddick, as part of the story's logic, and when you finally do break out, you reflect on how rewarding that extensive journey has been. Riddick is anything but a typical FPS, and by experimenting with so many different systems in the midst of unique development cycles, Starbreeze ended up with a surprising classic on its hands.

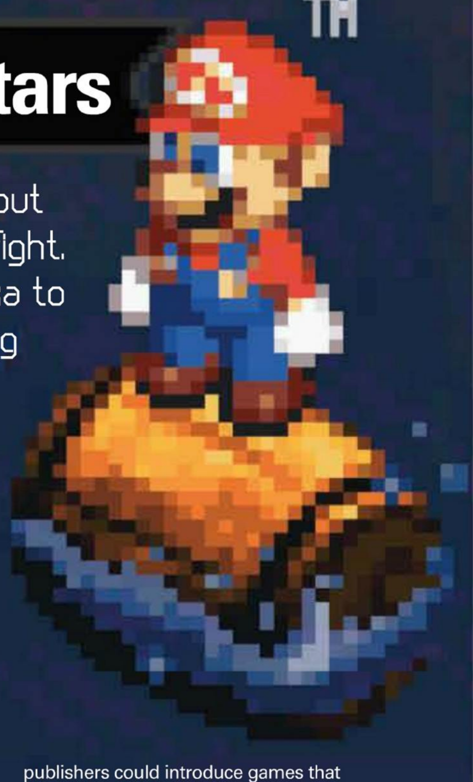
THE MAKING OF

Super Mario RPG

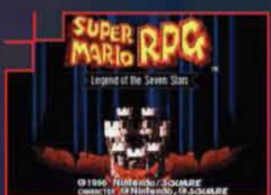
Legend Of The Seven Stars







1996 marked the end of the road for the SNES, but Nintendo wasn't about to let it go down without a fight. Sorrel Tilley caught up with director Chihiro Fujioka to get the scoop on Super Mario's super swansong



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** SQUARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **PLATFORM:** SNES
- » **GENRE:** RPG



There's no denying it. Life was sweet for the SNES owner. Within the space of just five years, the system's library was swollen with classics, and chief among them were masterpieces crafted by Square and Nintendo. The mere mention of the likes of *Final Fantasy VI, Chrono Trigger* and *Super Mario World* are enough to send most gamers into paroxysms of nostalgia. It is said that all good things must come to an end, but even as the sun was setting on the SNES, behind closed doors the movers and shakers were planning something unprecedented – a collaboration between two of the biggest developers of the era.

The result of this partnership was Nintendo's moustachioed mascot's first foray in the role-playing genre. Square's own Chihiro Fujioka recalls how it went down: "The original idea was decided in meetings at the highest level. When I was put in charge, it had already been set in stone, but I heard that the background to it was that due to the very close relationship between Nintendo and Square in those days, working together on a project meant they would combine their respective strong suits – the Mario character and RPG development."

The basic concept was a simple one; its execution was not. Taking a beloved figurehead and throwing him headlong into a new genre without upsetting the fans requires a lot of thought, as Fujioka explains: "The world view and the story changed completely. In the beginning, we thought Mario would be fighting using weapons and magic, but as you'd expect, we concluded that Mario was more suited to the hammer and jumping, so we modified the settings and the story. Even after development had moved on, we were still beating our heads over whether or not Mario should use weapons and magic. Mr Miyamoto also seemed to be in two minds over this. It was only when we both took to the stage at a magazine event that we finally decided.

"It was at the V-Jump Festival, an event organised by Shueisha's monthly game and hobby magazine. Readers were invited to the venue so that publishers could introduce games that were about to be released. It was here that *Super Mario RPG* was revealed to the world for the first time – I remember how surprised the readers and the organisers were. Right at the time of this magazine event, we had to decide on Mario's fighting style – weapons and magic, or jumping and hammers? Even while we were backstage at the event, Mr Miyamoto and I were still talking it over. Then, when it became our turn to introduce our game, I said: 'Let's just decide his fighting style based on how much the





» [SNES] The eagle-eyed will spot plenty of Nintendo character cameos.

audience applauds.' Mr Miyamoto replied doubtfully, 'Is that going to be okay?' but we went along with the plan anyway."

"To tell the truth, though, there was a feeling, among the staff too, that it would be best if Mario fought with hammers and jumping. Actually asking the audience was a big gamble, but I came up with a bit of a scheme to make sure things went our way. First, I said suddenly, but in a normal, businesslike voice: 'Could you please clap if you think that because this time Mario is in an RPG, it would be good if he used weapons and magic.' Small applause. Next, in a loud voice, full of energy and excitement: 'But of course this is Mario, so it'd be way better if he fought with jumps and hammers, right? Those people – applaud now!' Lots of applause. And that's how it turned out. Mr Miyamoto – sorry for worrying you!"

Mario's unexpected appearance in an RPG aside, audiences were wowed by his new 3D look. The team had been hard at work on the same Silicon Graphics workstations that Nintendo had authorised Rare to purchase for its *Donkey Kong Country* series. Although a rudimentary 2D version of the game was created, it was used mainly as a testing ground for Mario's movement and abilities before plans for the switch to 3D were finalised.

"At that point in time, Square was putting a lot of effort into visual presentation, and they had really pursued this up to the limits of what the Super Famicom hardware could do with 2D methods," explains Fujioka. "The big question was where to go from there. I think it was natural that things would go in the direction of 3D. When I think about it now, the whole of Square was headed that way. Of course, in the beginning, we had a traditional top-down map with a 2D Mario, but at a fairly early stage we revised it to a slanted 3D perspective, so after that we also had to make the entire graphic design follow suit. Even with the SA-1 chip, the Super Famicom wasn't capable of displaying 3D in real-time, so we went with a pre-rendering technique."

> In the beginning, we thought Mario would fight using magic, but we concluded that he was more suited to the hammer and jumping

This SA-1 chip was another weapon in Nintendo's arsenal of enhancements that kept SNES games evolving over time. While Sega was developing pricey add-on systems to prevent the Mega Drive from becoming stale, Nintendo opted to boost its hardware with special co-processor chips included within the game cartridges themselves. Possibly the most famous of these was the Super FX chip, which handled the real-time 3D effects in games such as *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*. The Super Accelerator 1 was less common outside Japan, with only three games seeing international release. "The SA-1 chip had four times the processing power of the Super Famicom," Fujioka elaborates. "Adding that to the console's CPU made five times the processing power possible. *Super Mario RPG* didn't use polygons, but the whole thing utilised a 3D field, so we used the extra oomph

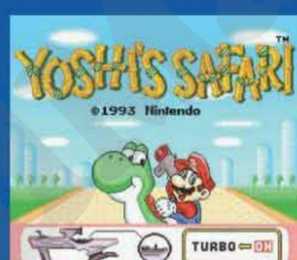
MOONLIGHTING MARIO

Is there a genre that Mario hasn't dabbled in? No...



Mario Paint

MARIO WENT all arty-farty back in '92. His music generator remains popular on YouTube.



Yoshi's Safari

MARIO GOT trigger-happy in this Super Scope rail shooter that also featured his dinosaur sidekick.



Mario & Wario

USE THE mouse to save a bucket-headed Mario – from himself!

Dr Mario

PRESCRIPTION PADS at the ready for this pill-poppin' puzzler.

Mario No Photopi

ONLY THE Japanese got this N64 photo-manipulation package.

for those calculations. It also allowed us to use more characters than usual."

The game was primarily a Square production, but Nintendo made sure the team was not left floundering with Mario's transition to a new dimension and genre. "It was a very close and favourable relationship. They offered us support with various new techniques, starting with the SA-1 chip, and ideas for presenting pseudo-3D on the Super Famicom," Fujioka recalls. "From the beginning, Mr Miyamoto came in often to meet and talk, and of course we even took to the stage together at V-Jump. I received advice from him



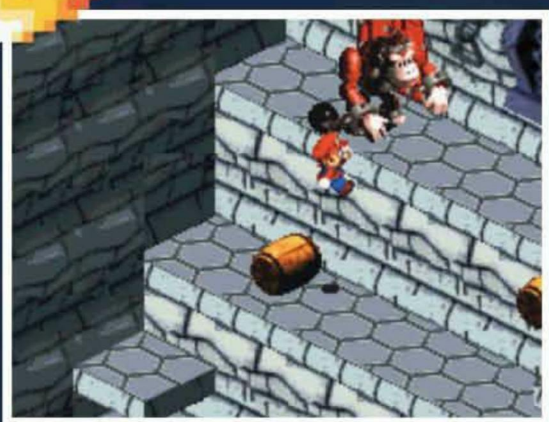
» [SNES] Why does nobody respect Bowser's authoritah?

on two main points: one was keeping an eye on handling Mario's entry into the RPG world without destroying the *Mario* universe; the other was the actual concept of fun in the game – in the early stages of development, I proposed the gameplay that *Super Mario RPG* would revolve around, explaining: 'I want to achieve something that everybody wants to do, but nobody has been able to.' Mr Miyamoto approved."

Fujioka remembers another time that Miyamoto gave him advice while writing the script for moving yellow blocks in the game. Miyamoto noticed that it was possible for the player to easily slip and fall from these blocks, and suggested that Fujioka try making them stop for a split second when Mario landed. "I revised the code immediately, and the gameplay really improved. It was a great experience to be able to see first-hand Mr Miyamoto's fixation on game controls.

once. However, I've now forgotten what his original form looked like! I did prepare two sketches for this boss, but I get the feeling they were completely altered during testing." Unfortunately, at that time, it was necessary to trim many areas from the ROM capacity, and the morphing boss became nothing more than a phantom character.

"There were a good number of other early ideas that didn't make it into the final game, but it would be more accurate to say that they were starting points, rather than things we couldn't do – they changed throughout the course of developing the


» [SNES] Square doffs its cap to *Donkey Kong Country*'s graphical influence here.


» [SNES] As well as all-new characters and enemies, traditional series tropes were re-imagined in new roles for *Super Mario RPG*.

> Super Mario RPG's cast of characters and lighthearted story and script won over gamers and critics alike

"This was a difficult area – how much of the action aspect of Mario to represent in an RPG and, further, how to actually achieve that. With regards to programming and scripting, almost all the events in the game had some kind of interactive gameplay, and customising the code for them one by one was a big job. 3D data was also created for everything from the backgrounds to the characters and items, but it was our first experience with that, so it was an incredibly tough job."

Even with a 4MB cartridge and the SA-1 chip, the game was bursting at the seams: "In terms of the game's content, there's one thing that even the development staff might have forgotten about. There were plans to include a shape-shifting boss character in the second half of the game, which would morph during battle. I persuaded the coders to put together a morphing program, which they made at

game. For example, we wanted to have Mario use devices in one part of the map that would have a domino effect on various devices in other parts of the map, so in the early days, 'chain reaction' was something of a keyword that we based our ideas around. Expanding from that, we got all the areas with events that focus on action."

Super Mario RPG isn't only known for its technical accomplishments, however – its cast of characters and lighthearted story and script won over gamers and critics alike. Even Mario's long-time nemesis, Bowser, was given his first comedy role. Rather than kidnapping Peach and menacing the player characters, he teams up with them and spends his time alternately weeping over his stolen castle, reciting haikus about being lonely, and trying to convince everybody that Mario has joined his gang. "Mr Miyamoto didn't stipulate

MORE MARIO RPG SPIN-OFFS

When Square got into bed with Sony, Mario's role-playing future looked uncertain. Fans were overjoyed, then, when they got not one but two spin-off series

Paper Mario



Year: 2000 **System:** N64

WITH SQUARE out of the picture, a change of title was called for, so *Super Mario RPG 2* became *Paper Mario*. Just like its forebear, this game was released late in the system's life, and showed off some striking visuals, albeit in a different way – Mario was now flat as a pancake!

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door



Year: 2004 **System:** GameCube

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS' second game was also critically praised. It had a greater emphasis on gameplay based around the paper theme, with Mario using curses to fold himself into aeroplanes, boats and tubes. Side-scrolling sections featuring Bowser paved the way for the Wii sequel.

Super Paper Mario



Year: 2007 **System:** Wii

THE SERIES' third instalment continued to surprise gamers by toying with notions of 2D and 3D. *Super Paper Mario* returns the plumber to his platforming roots, but with a twist – the ability to switch between 2D and 3D perspectives at will. A sequel is due for the 3DS this year.

Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga



Year: 2003 **System:** Game Boy Advance

CREATED BY AlphaDream with the involvement of Fujioka, this is often regarded as the true successor to *Super Mario RPG*. Why? "Maybe because it has the same battle system, musician (Yoko Shimomura) and comical story style. It's for handhelds and features Luigi, so I think it can coexist with *Paper Mario*."

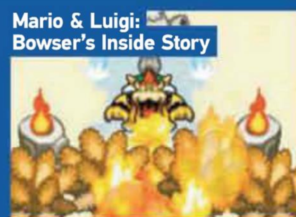
Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time



Year: 2005 **System:** Nintendo DS

AS YOU might expect, *Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time* used the dual screens to expand on Mario and Luigi's interaction from the first game. The appearance of Baby Mario and Baby Luigi allowed for puzzles requiring the co-ordination of all four characters to solve this time-travelling adventure.

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story



Year: 2009 **System:** Nintendo DS

The latest game in the series took on an *Innerspace*-style dynamic, with the Italian duo being miniaturised and inhaled by Bowser. Will we see a fourth title in the series, possibly on the 3DS? Fujioka says: "This is still undecided. I'd be happy if we received a lot of requests to continue. Please root for us!"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SECRET OF MANA (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1993

FINAL FANTASY
SYSTEM: NES
YEAR: 1987

XENOGEARS
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998

any rules; he pretty much gave us a free hand, although he did let us know which series characters he wanted to appear," remembers Fujioka. "There were a lot of staff members who were fans of comedy and stand-up, so it was only natural that it would end up that way. Bowser's various lines and facial expressions were created freely by the people in charge of each area and event. It was all fine because Mr Miyamoto didn't get angry!"

One of the most enduring original characters to spring from the game was Geno. Although legal issues between Square and Nintendo have prevented a full-blown comeback for the wooden boy, he has maintained a cult following. "I only found out about Geno's popularity later, so I got him to make a reappearance in *Superstar Saga* [laughs]. I wish I knew why he's so popular! I think people are interested in him because he's a doll that's come to life – he seems to have something of the profound about him."

Super Mario RPG was released just months before the Nintendo 64 went on sale and was an immediate success: "It was the point at which the highest number of gamers owned a Super Famicom and, thanks to this, we sold a *lot* of copies. On the other hand, with the N64 out and Square defecting to the PlayStation, we never got to make a true sequel."

On top of this, working on Mario's last game on the SNES must have been a bittersweet experience. "We had no idea!" admits Fujioka. Indeed, when Miyamoto announced at the V-Jump Festival that the game would be Mario's final 16-bit outing, Fujioka's reaction was short and comical: "What!?"

Minority Report

This month we delve a hand deep into the big bag marked 'obscure gaming' and pull out a possible precursor to Batman: Arkham Asylum, the sort of sequel to the classic SNES mobile suit shooter Cybernator, and a cracking little arcade platformer for the Apple II



» SNES



» [SNES] The presentation is superb, boasting some stunning character designs and sprite work.

METAL WARRIORS

■ SYSTEM: SNES ■ DEVELOPER: LUCASARTS ■ YEAR: 1995

■ **A common misconception made by SNES owners is that *Metal Warriors* is the sequel to *Cybernator* (aka *Assault Suits Valken*). It's a perfectly understandable assumption to make, given that their visuals, themes and control systems are uncannily similar.**

The truth is the games aren't connected at all and were developed by completely separate companies. NCS Corp created *Cybernator*, while LucasArts – yep, you read that right – was responsible for *Metal Warriors*. Both games were published by Konami, but while the former received a global release, the latter was only released in the US and, as a result, became a relative unknown to all but the most hardcore SNES shooter fans outside the States. Well, thankfully, Minority Report is here, albeit 17 years too late, to champion games such as *Metal Warriors* that are deeply deserving of some recognition.

The story behind the game is your typical mech-based malarkey. Set in the year 2102, you are Lt Stone, commander of the titular Metal Warriors – a band of soldiers trained in driving assault suits, sworn to protect the world's united government from a powerful terrorist group that has it under siege. The first few missions begin in the far reaches of space and feature some pretty varied mission objectives to complete, from rescuing a scientist to protecting an allied ship under enemy attack. As the story progresses, though, the action moves to Earth, where an epic clash between both sides takes place in and around jungles and decimated cities.

While we're not knocking *Cybernator*, *Metal Warriors* possesses

» TURBOGRAFX-16



» BATMAN

■ SYSTEM: TURBOGRAFX-16
■ DEVELOPER: SUNSOFT ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Another in the** long line of games based on Tim Burton's 1989 movie, but what makes this unique is it plays like a mixture of *Pac-Man* and *Bomberman*. It sees Bats dropped into a series of mazes patrolled by guards and the Joker's henchmen, and having to complete objectives without getting caught, from collecting up Smilex to cleaning paintings in the Flugelheim Museum – when Sunsoft said we'd be helping Batman clean up, this isn't what we had in mind. Being that it's fairly light on action and very repetitive, the fact that it's an unusual *Batman* game is the chief reason we're recommending it.

» TURBOGRAFX-16

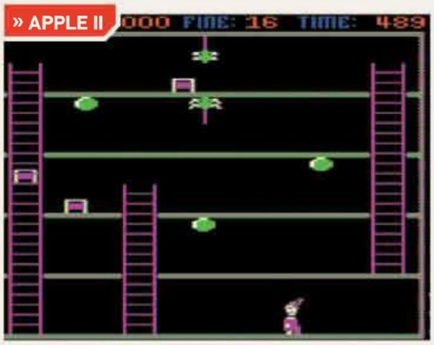


» KNIGHT RIDER SPECIAL

■ SYSTEM: TURBOGRAFX-16
■ DEVELOPER: PACK-IN-VIDEO ■ YEAR: 1994

■ **That this is** superior to Ocean's disastrous home computer adaptation of *Knight Rider* should come as no real shock. A sprite-scaling checkpoint racer featuring boss fights, *Knight Rider Special* borrows a lot from Taito's *Chase HQ*. Taking control of KITT, you share the road with other vehicles that you can overtake or blow to pieces with your machine guns. Oddly, the Trans Am also has the ability to accelerate to 200mph and momentarily fly, which we don't remember from the show. This potentially fun racer is marred by clunky handling and pedestrian tracks, but for fans of the show it's still worth seeking out.

» APPLE II



» HALLOWE'EN

■ SYSTEM: APPLE II
■ DEVELOPER: MICRO-SPARC ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **This enjoyable arcade** puzzle/platformer sees a spirited young wizard on an errand to clear screens of green pumpkins. Situated around each stage are deadly enemies capable of killing our hero outright, and, applying more pressure to his task, should our wizard take too long to retrieve the pumpkins, they become animated, deadly and start bounding around the level. If this happens, the wizard must use his trusty magic stick to create holes in the ground for the lively pumpkins to fall through, basically turning orange squash into orange smash. It's a fun concept that clearly owes a lot to the classic *Space Panic*.



» [SNES] It looks like *Cybernator*, sounds like *Cybernator*, plays like *Cybernator* and was published by the same company as *Cybernator*.



» [SNES] The duel mode is a nice addition. In fact, it could almost be a game in itself. Well… almost.









» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The SNES was released in Japan in 1990, North America the following year, and appeared on UK and Australian shores in 1992.
- In South Korea the console was known as the Super Comboy and was distributed by Hyundai Electronics.



a few inventive ideas that elevate it above NCS's game in a number of ways, the most notable of which is letting you wear a variety of different mobile suits instead of one. There are six in all, and each has its own unique weapons and attributes. There's one that can roll itself up into a ball, another that is basically a big bipedal gun, and a really interesting one that resembles a spider and can shoot webs and scale walls.

At any point you can choose to abandon your suit and jump into any others that are dotted around the level. All the time you're de-suited you assume control of a tiny little man wearing a jetpack and armed with a fairly puny gun, and naturally are more vulnerable to enemy attacks. Also, as the only indicator as to whether your robo bubby is about to bite the bullet is the amount of unhealthy-looking smoke and sparks it leaks, it's a good idea to keep a mental note of where suits are located, or move them to easily reachable places, in case you need them in a hurry. Oh, and you need to be careful where you abandon your suit too, as cunning human enemies will jump into them when you're not looking and start using them against you.

If all that hasn't persuaded you to seek *Metal Warriors* out, then there is one final ace up its sleeve: an entertaining split-screen head-to-head mode, which lets you and a pal pick a suit from the six on offer and engage in a fight to the death. It's a fantastic mode that really expands the game's longevity, making *Metal Warriors* one slick package that fans of mobile suit shooters should definitely seek out.



» [SNES] There are six different suits in the game, and each has a unique set of weapons and powers.

» GAME GEAR



» PANZER DRAGOON MINI

■ SYSTEM: GAME GEAR
■ DEVELOPER: SEGA ■ YEAR: 1996

■ **Considering the host** platform, *Panzer Dragoon Mini* is a gutsy effort at minimising the Saturn classic. The first section of each level takes the form of a *Space Harrier*-style blaster, while the camera swings around during boss battles to display the action in a side-on perspective. Like traditional *Panzer Dragoon*, holding down the fire button and dragging the target reticle over enemies initiates the lock-on shot to effortlessly destroy multiple targets. While the shooting can feel imprecise and the levels sparse, the overall ambition of this title is pleasing. It isn't deemed to be canon, though, and was only released in Japan.

» GAME BOY

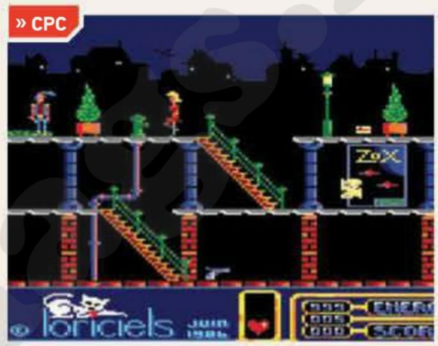


» MOTOCROSS MANIACS

■ SYSTEM: GAME BOY
■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI ■ YEAR: 1989

■ **Fans of *Excitebike*** and *Kikstart 2* will almost certainly get a kick out of *Motocross Maniacs*, which is basically a great meld of the two, but with a sprinkling of *Super Mario Land*. Players get to compete on eight different circuits, which are designed like levels in a platformer, featuring collectables, ledges and ramps to jump. The key to success is to master your landing to ensure that your rider doesn't get flung from his bike. With its simple controls, addictive score-attack gameplay, and neat versus mode to enjoy once you tire of the solo game, *Motocross Maniacs* is a fun little handheld racer.

» CPC



» BILLY LA BANLIEUE

■ SYSTEM: CPC
■ DEVELOPER: LORICIELS ■ YEAR: 1986

■ ***Billy La Banlieue*** is an interesting platform game. Playing the role of a French Teddy Boy, your mission is to help him raise his street cred by steering him around Paris to play the latest arcade machines. Unfortunately for Billy, dangerous street dwellers block his path and will only let him pass if he offers them an object they desire, meaning there's a fair bit of exploration involved. Though the stiff and awkward controls do let the game down, and the level design feels bewildering at times, the visuals and imaginative theme still make this worth investigating. And as a nice touch, you even get to play the games you reach.



In the chair with...

IAN LIVINGSTONE

Created by Games Workshop co-founders Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson, the Fighting Fantasy series of gamebooks turns 30 this year. Dave Cook caught up with Ian to discuss the roots of the series, and how it led him to become one of the most influential figures in British videogames

LIFE-LONG *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* fan Ian Livingstone is a born gamer, having established the legendary Games Workshop in 1975, as well as releasing his first *Fighting Fantasy* gamebook in 1982, the iconic *Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*. Ian first broke into videogame design in 1984 as designer of the Domark text adventure *Eureka!* for the Commodore and Sinclair systems. This initial step triggered a glittering career in British gaming. Today Ian serves as life president at Eidos Interactive, and is a proud champion of the UK industry's rich gaming heritage.

RETRO GAMER: Your videogame career effectively began with a concept for a book called *Magic Quest*. How did this come about?

IAN LIVINGSTONE: Steve Jackson and I got into role-playing games in the mid-Seventies when we started Games Workshop, and got hold of our first copy of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

We were captivated with *D&D,* which was the first fantasy role-playing game. Our imaginations ran wild and we became obsessive players. But we were also aware that *D&D* required a huge commitment in time and effort in order to enjoy it to the full – you needed a dungeon master, a group of four or five players to make it fun, and a time commitment each session of at least four or five hours if any progress was to be made.

We thought about ways that we could widen the appeal of role-playing without dumbing it down. The big 'Eureka!' moment came when we thought we should apply a simple role-playing system to a book. So we tinkered around with mechanics we thought would work in book format, and that evolved over time from this concept which was labelled '*Magic Quest*', to the series now known as *Fighting Fantasy*.

RG: How did you secure Penguin as the publisher for *Magic Quest*?

IL: With Games Workshop, we used to organise these Games Day events, and at the 1980 Games Day, Geraldine Cooke, who was Penguin's commissioning puzzle book editor, had a stand at the event to promote a book they'd recently published called *Playing Politics*.

Geraldine was bowled over by the enthusiasm of people playing *D&D* and other fantasy role-playing games at Games Day, so she asked, "Could you write a book about the role-playing hobby?" Steve and I thought about it, and we decided that well, if we're writing a book about the hobby, why couldn't we write a book that effectively *is* the hobby?

RG: Over time this concept became your first book, *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*.

IL: Yes, we continued to kick the project around for the best part of a year, but in the meantime Steve sent a copy of *Magic Quest* over to George Allen & Unwin, who were the publishers of *Lord Of The Rings*. Steve suggested to them that the books could be Gandalf adventures, but we got a very polite rejection letter.

That letter was actually a blessing in disguise. If we had gone with Allen & Unwin, we would not have owned the intellectual property of gamebooks based on Tolkien's works. Eventually we got word back from Penguin saying, "Yes, let's go ahead with your book", so we started writing it. *Magic Quest* became *Fighting Fantasy* and our first book we called *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*, released just a year later in 1982. *Fighting Fantasy* belonged to us, and still does I'm very pleased to say.

RG: Were you surprised at the success of *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain* when it finally launched?

IL: Given the marketing that Penguin's children label Puffin gave to it, yes! Clearly there was no internet back in those days, no viral marketing, as it were. But there was word of mouth, and nothing was better than that.



"We thought about ways we could widen the appeal of role-playing without dumbing it down"

SELECTED TIMELINE

Eureka! 1984
Bloodshot 1994
Deathtrap Dungeon 1998
Gangsters: Organised Crime 1998
Warzone 2100 1999
Omikron: The Nomad Soul 1999
Deus Ex 2000
Championship Manager 00/01 2000
Republic: The Revolution 2003
Rogue Trooper 2006
Hitman: Blood Money 2006
Tomb Raider: Legend 2006
Tomb Raider: Anniversary 2007
Tomb Raider: Underworld 2008
Batman: Arkham Asylum 2009
Deus Ex: Human Revolution 2011
The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain 2011

So when Puffin launched the book, they didn't do any marketing whatsoever, although we did write a couple of articles about it in *White Dwarf*, and used the Games Workshop fan base to tell people about *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*.

At first there were hardly any sales at all, but in a matter of a few weeks, pockets of enthusiasm were established for Warlock as schools discovered it. And pupils in one school told their friends about it in other schools. All of a sudden *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain* was a playground craze.

RG: How much of a practical impact did this have on the series?

IL: It became a craze in the playground, and this craze then spread nationwide. Puffin finally figured out that they had a hit title on their hands, requiring them to order reprints, but they still weren't convinced *Fighting Fantasy* wasn't just going to be a five-minute wonder. I think they did about ten reprints in two months.

Every time they reprinted the book it was a very small print run, until finally they said, "I think we've got something here." Puffin then asked us to write two more books, and Steve and I obliged, deciding to write each of them separately so we could keep up with the demand. So then Steve wrote *Citadel Of Chaos* and I wrote *Forest Of Doom*.

RG: The 50th *Fighting Fantasy* book, *Return To Firetop Mountain,* was released in 1992 and was billed as the final book in the *Fighting Fantasy* series. Why did you decide that *Return To Firetop Mountain* would be the last?

IL: We actually didn't decide ourselves. It was Penguin that decided it would be the last book. They decided that sales were beginning to tail off because people were now playing videogames. *Fighting Fantasy* had been around for ten years, and maybe it was time to call it a day. But thanks to our fantastic fans who kept on buying them in the face of this huge threat, Penguin continued to commission more books, until it finally ended in 1995.

RG: Did Penguin's order of ten more books surprise you, given, as you say, the rising popularity of videogames as entertainment?

IL: Yes to a point. But they knew *Fighting Fantasy* still had a lot of fans. For me personally it was incredibly gratifying to know that *Fighting Fantasy* had struck a chord with so many people for such a long period of time. And when I meet people today in their late 30s or 40s and they ask, "Are you the Ian Livingstone who used to write those fantasy books with the green spine?" and I reply that I am, they're like, "Oh,

* FIVE TO PLAY

TOMB RAIDER II



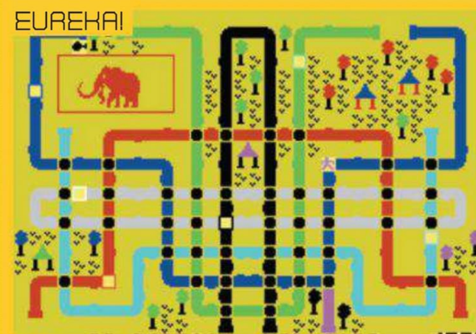
ARGUABLY THE FINEST entry in the PlayStation *Tomb Raider* series – and Ian's favourite entry to date – the 1997 gaming smash *Tomb Raider II* built upon Core Design's original concept and polished it to a whole new level of excellence. The plot saw Lara embarking on a globetrotting expedition to locate the Dagger of Xian. Moving away from tomb and rural settings, the Venice stages linger in the mind for their superb architecture, tricky climbing and the occasional thrilling speedboat section thrown in for good measure. Through *Tomb Raider II*'s improved visuals, wider range of locations and truly fiendish puzzles, Core Design showed what could be achieved in 3D games, raising the bar for competing developers everywhere. Lara's success would see her become something of an unofficial mascot for the PlayStation brand, propelling her to the very height of gaming stardom for many years to come.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER '93



CREATED BY PAUL and Oliver Collyer, Domark's *Championship Manager* series debuted to a lukewarm reception. However, the PC and Amiga follow-up *Championship Manager '93* made amends by delivering a whopping roster of real-life players from around the world, as well as improving on almost every complaint aimed at the previous game. *Championship Manager '93* would go to be such a success that it was expanded with add-on discs for the 1994 season, including all-new transfers and player updates. From shaky beginnings, the series continues to enjoy a strong following, and has since moved into the iOS and MMO market.

EUREKA!



IAN'S GAME INDUSTRY debut, text adventure *Eureka!* launched on Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum in 1984. Consisting of five acts, the player must visit several time periods and countries to solve an overarching puzzle that spans ancient Rome, Germany during World War II, and medieval Britain. It was a bold concept, adding a hit point system to the standard text adventure format. Domark promised a $25,000 cash reward to the first person who completed Eureka! before 31 December 1985. Upon completing the game, the player had to leave their details on an answering machine. The winner was British teen Matthew Woodley.

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION



AFTER BEING IN development for what felt like an age at Eidos Montreal, this cyberpunk prequel to Ion Storm's *Deus Ex* titles finally saw a release in August of 2011. Following up the impeccable standards set by the original games wasn't going to be easy, but the developer had a good crack at it. The game delivered all of the series' staples, giving players freedom to tackle every situation as they saw fit, and setting it in a well-realised, frequently grim depiction of a dystopian future. While fans of the Warren Spector's *2000* original may prefer it over this new game, Eidos Montreal has established itself as a force to be reckoned with in today's industry.

THE WARLOCK OF FIRETOP MOUNTAIN



IAN LIVINGSTONE AND Steve Jackson's 1982 *Fighting Fantasy* debut, *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain* has recently been re-released on iTunes, with all of the original text intact. The plot follows your adventure as you travel to the titular mountain in search of untold riches. The only problem is that said treasure is locked away in a chest sealed by two locks, and surrounded by hidden dangers and monsters guarding the spoils. Canadian developer Big Blue Bubble has added interactive pages to the iOS version, including an automated stat counter system and a die roll generator to give you everything you need throughout your adventure.

I used to love those as a kid," and they get very excited, full of nostalgia. It's brilliant to see a rise in the popularity of *Fighting Fantasy* again, a re-emergence of the genre of solo gamebooks. I think this is absolutely fantastic.

RG: The *Fighting Fantasy* series garnered global notoriety until it ended in 1995. At what point did you decide you wanted to get into videogames as well?

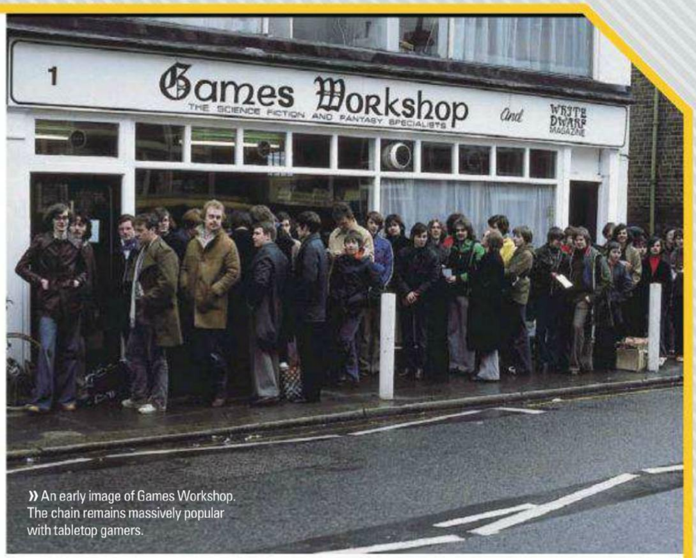
IL: Well, we stocked videogames in Games Workshop stores, before the decision was taken to sell only products that were based on Games Workshop-owned IP. We also licensed some of our *Fighting Fantasy* books as text adventures, published on the Commodore 64 and Spectrum.

Back in the day I had been the proud owner of an 8k Commodore PET, and then I went on to get an Amiga, so I was a keen player of computer games, and when *Deathtrap Dungeon* came out in 1984 it was a hugely successful book in the children's market.

At the time a popular kid's book would sell between 5,000-10,000 copies a year, but *Deathtrap Dungeon* sold over 400,000 copies in its first year of publication. This was noticed by the two co-founders of Domark Mark Strachan and Dominic Wheatley, who contacted me to ask if I would consider designing their first game, which was to be a text adventure with basic graphics called *Eureka!*

RG: *Eureka!* was quite a fresh concept in that it was a text adventure linked to a whopping cash prize.

IL: Mark and Dominic were two ex-advertising agency executives who I think had seen Kit Williams' book *Masquerade*. Inspired by it, they thought about a launch product that involved offering a prize. So they decided to offer a £25,000 prize to the first person who solved *Eureka!* I agreed to take on the project and set about designing the concept and storyline. Mark and Dominic decided it would be programmed in Budapest for secrecy. At the time of the Cold War, that was an interesting choice. We went over to Budapest several times to meet the developers. It was a great adventure. Some of the clues to win were in the rules booklet, and some of them were actually in the game itself. The net result was that you would end up with a phone number which would give you access to an answering machine in a solicitor's office. The first person to leave a message would win £25,000. I remember handing over the cheque on national television.



» An early image of Games Workshop. The chain remains massively popular with tabletop gamers.

> "Fighting Fantasy struck a chord with so many people for such a long period of time"

RG: Over the next few years you were kept fairly busy with Domark, Games Workshop and *Fighting Fantasy*, so when did you decide to shift your attention entirely onto videogames?

IL: *Eureka!* got me involved with computer games on the design side. I was invited to invest in Domark, and I did because I thought it would be a great opportunity to move my content into the world of technology.

This was 1984 and at the time I was still running Games Workshop and writing *Fighting Fantasy* with Steve, so I didn't get involved in an operational way until after selling Games Workshop in 1991. After Domark published *Eureka!*, the company specialised in producing a range of licensed products such as *F1*, *Trivial Pursuit*, *James Bond*, *Prince of Persia* and its own ground-breaking *Championship Manager*, which was designed by the great football-mad Collyer brothers.

I joined the board of Domark in 1992 at a difficult time of transition when the 16-bit market was going into decline. But we survived that crisis and in 1995 Domark became one of the four companies that merged to create a new British publisher and developer: Eidos.

RG: You've also seen a lot of your *Fighting Fantasy* books adapted as text adventures. Were you interested in action-oriented adaptations as well?

IL: In terms of someone taking one of our books and making it into, say, a platform game, we wouldn't have allowed that unless it was a brilliantly innovative game that captured the essence of *Fighting Fantasy*.

Adding graphics, animation, sound, speech, et cetera, would add a lot to the experience. But if you wanted to play a *Fighting Fantasy* text adventure, then you might as well buy the book, because back then it was hard to carry around a computer in your pocket, as old computers weren't exactly pocket-sized iPhones [laughs]. Today, I would really like to see a stunning visual action-adventure adaptation of a *Fighting Fantasy* book for the iPad or next-gen consoles.

RG: Perhaps the most prolific *Fighting Fantasy* adaptation was the Eidos-developed *Deathtrap Dungeon* on PlayStation. Despite selling well, the game received a mixed critical reaction. What's your take on the end product?

IL: To put it mildly, that was an interesting experiment. The development team was young and inexperienced, and they ended up having to drop the RPG element of the *Deathtrap Dungeon* book and turn the game into a purely action game, which was a great shame for many reasons. Despite their best efforts, the game engine wasn't great and neither were the graphics or the gameplay.

The team cut its teeth on *Deathtrap* which, in hindsight, I shouldn't have allowed them to do. But nevertheless, it showed the strength of the IP as it sold a lot of copies. So again, I have to say thank you to the fans for buying the game, and I'm sorry it wasn't as good as it should have been.

RG: Do you think an action-based adaptation would be better handled with today's tech?

IL: Yes, of course. Technology today allows a graphics-intense cinematic experience to be created. I would love studios like BioWare or Bethesda Softworks to develop the game. There was



The original team behind Games Workshop: Ian Livingstone, John Peake, and Steve Jackson.

even a reference to gamebooks in *Skyrim* so the studio is obviously into gamebooks. Eidos Montreal would also do a fantastic job, following on from what they achieved with *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*.

RG: Returning to the Domark years, you were instrumental in the studio being absorbed into the group soon to become Eidos Interactive in 1995. Was this a volatile time for all of the companies concerned?

IL: The mid-Nineties were challenging times. I joined Domark in 1992, having sold out of Games Workshop at a time when, unknowingly, the 16-bit market was about to fall off the edge of a cliff. I joined Domark following my investment, and was faced with a steep learning curve with regards to transitioning between platforms.

The company was clearly under-capitalised, and it faced many challenges. Even though it had some great IP, it was still a small company and we learned that you need deep pockets to survive a hardware transition. So we did quite a lot of restructuring, refocusing of the titles, as well as platforms, but in the end we needed to be bigger.

RG: And so this then lead to the merger?

IL: Yes, we agreed to merge four companies to build a new, larger games company. These were Eidos Technologies and Domark, as well as two games development studios – Simis, which produced flight simulations, and Big Red, which produced driving simulations. These four companies were merged to form Eidos Interactive.

The new entity floated on the London stock exchange in October 1995, and I became chairman from that day, until 2002. The big moment for us came six months later in March 1996 when we acquired games publisher plc, CentreGold. With CentreGold came Core Design, and with Core came *Tomb Raider*. It was love at first sight!

RG: Eidos broke onto the scene in a big way with *Tomb Raider* in 1996, at a time when 3D gaming was becoming the norm. How difficult was it to keep up with the rapidly changing industry?

IL: One of the most interesting and great things about the games industry is that it's constantly changing. Linear entertainment doesn't have much in the way of transformational change, yet all the time, almost every day, something new happens in the games industry. Technology drives innovation and opportunity. *Tomb Raider* was certainly at the cutting edge at the time of release. It was one of the first third-person action-adventure console titles. It was one of the first games with a lead female character. It had amazing technology, graphics, puzzles, level design and gameplay.

RG: The series did hit a rocky patch when it shifted to the PlayStation 2. Was that a difficult time for you?

IL: Yes, the real challenge came with a change in format. Core didn't quite cut it during the transition to PlayStation 2, and *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness* wasn't the game it should have been.

A tough decision was then made to move Lara from Core Design to Crystal Dynamics. It was painful to do this but everybody knew it was the right decision. Crystal seized the opportunity and did an amazing job in resurrecting a fantastic franchise. Having seen what's being developed in the new *Tomb Raider* game, all I can say is that I'm amazed at what the team at Crystal has achieved.

RG: Over the years, you have been an outspoken supporter of the UK games industry, as well as lobbying government support for both new and established studios. What is it about the UK industry that makes it stand out for you?

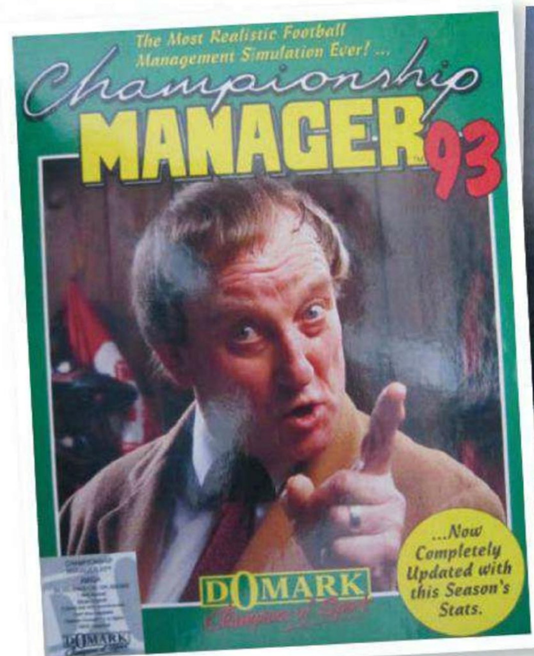
IL: In recent years, I've enjoyed playing *GTA, Batman: Arkham Asylum, LittleBigPlanet, LEGO: Star Wars*, and other great British console games. But the British games I remember playing years ago were *Elite, Populous, Lemmings, Manic Miner, Cannon Fodder, Sensible Soccer* and *Championship Manager*.

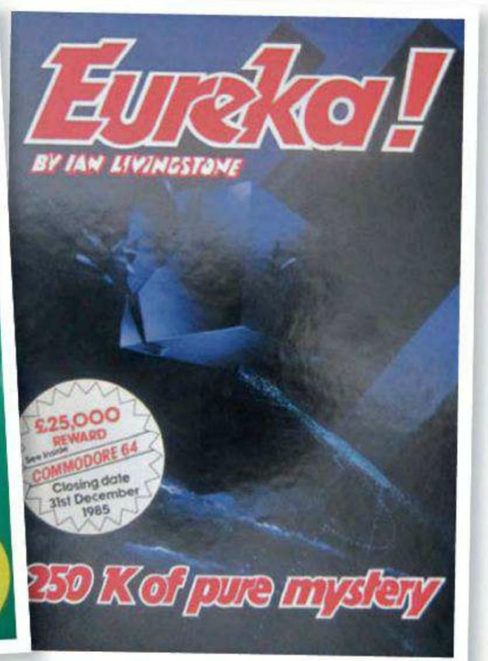
The UK has some of the best games designers in the world, and these games were made by small teams of people intent on creating original content, not obeying any particular rules, or having to serve content to a particular audience. They were just doing it for themselves.

RG: So what needs to be done to see the UK industry return to those glory days once again?

IL: I've been lobbying government on behalf of the games industry for many years. At first, we were not taken seriously – we'd always been

> "All the time, almost every day, something new happens in the games industry"





*NUMBER CRUNCHING

400: The maximum number of scenarios or sections in a *Fighting Fantasy* adventure book

14,000,000: The number of *Fighting Fantasy* books sold to date

59: The total number of books in the *Fighting Fantasy* series

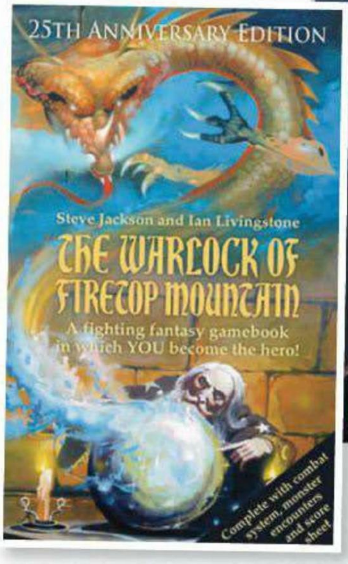
2006: The year Ian was awarded an OBE for "Services to the Computer Games Industry"

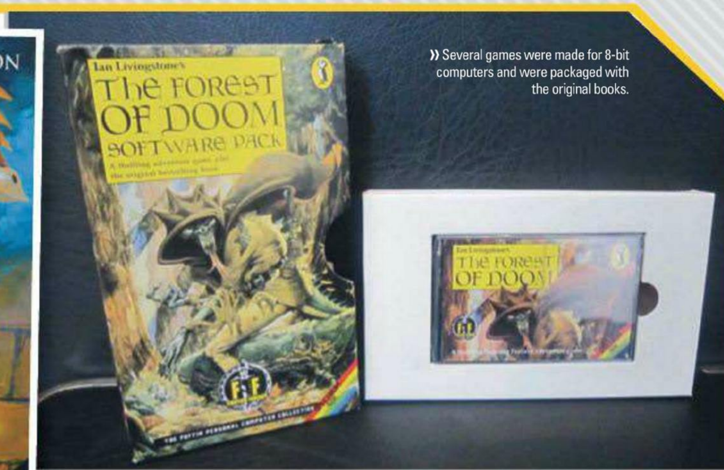
25,000: The number of British pounds won by Matthew Woodley for being the first person to complete *Eureka!*

5: The number of *Tomb Raider* games released on PlayStation before the series shifted to PlayStation 2.

15: The door number of the first Games Workshop store first opened on Bolingbroke Road, London in 1975

4: The number of separate companies that came together to form Eidos Interactive in 1995





» Several games were made for 8-bit computers and were packaged with the original books.

seen as the unruly child of the creative industries. There was an image problem and we got no support.

We are a very creative nation and we have incredible design talent in the UK. We are very well placed to have the best games development studios in the world as long as we support our industry by way of providing a skilled talent pool, access to finance and a competitive tax regime.

I think it's down to the media and government to raise the profile of the games industry, so that the nation can better understand the social, cultural and economical contribution the games industry makes to this country.

RG: Do you feel it's unfortunate that we used to teach kids how to code in the Eighties, but that it's become less of a concern today?

IL: Well, if you look back in time at the Eighties, the Sinclair Spectrum was the affordable, programmable computer in the home, and the BBC Micro was the cornerstone of computing in schools. Children were learning to code back then, and that gave rise to more kids wanting to learn computer science at university, and that in turn gave rise to the flying start Britain got in the computer and videogames industry. It seems ridiculous that we let go of that early advantage, especially at a time of such high youth unemployment.

RG: Despite all of the big shifts you've worked through in the games industry over the years, do you still get excited by change?

IL: I've always been excited by the opportunities that change brings, especially changes in technology.

The games industry is the largest entertainment industry in the world with sales in excess of 50 billion dollars a year, and that's likely to rise to 90 billion by 2015. If you have a passion for games – which I have had all my life, having been in the industry for over 35 years – I've never been bored and never will get bored by the possibilities of making new ways of playing games. It's just fantastic fun.

RG: Going full circle, *Fighting Fantasy* is turning 30 this year, and to mark the occasion you have written a brand new book. What can you tell us about the new release?

IL: Yes, it's the 30th anniversary, as many fans will no doubt know! That actually sounds really depressing when I think about it [laughs]. It's been 30 years since *Warlock Of Firetop Mountain* was released in August back in 1982, so I decided to write, as an homage I guess, a brand new adventure.

I hadn't written a *Fighting Fantasy* gamebook for many, many years. I started *Blood Of The Zombies* in 2009 and got more and more into it as time passed and the plot thickened so to speak. Recently I've tweeted (@ian_livingstone) about it quite a bit, and got people involved via social media to decide the title of the book. People voted and the winning title was *Blood Of The Zombies*. It's out in August 2012.

RG: Can you give us any insight into the plot?

IL: I've only had zombies appear occasionally in my earlier *Fighting Fantasy* books, and never en masse. So I decided to do a zombie book, because I've been influenced by so many zombie-based videogames and films over the years.

I've set the book in a contemporary setting. YOU the reader have been kidnapped and wake up in a Romanian castle. Your goal is to escape, and you have to kill a lot of zombies using a lot of firepower and weapons. There are quite a few twists and sub-plots in the adventure and the opportunity to mow down huge swathes of zombies. Clearly it isn't going to sell in the numbers a new *Fighting Fantasy* book would have sold in the Eighties, but I don't care. I have really enjoyed writing it and I hope that people will like it.

RG: Will you ever return to the *Fighting Fantasy* worlds you created back in the Eighties?

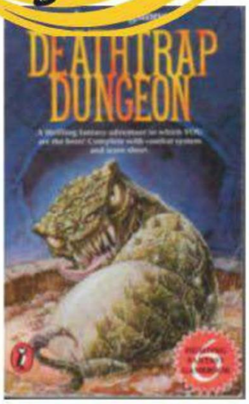
IL: I think many people would have expected this 30th anniversary book to be based around *Firetop Mountain*. But I didn't want to do that without collaborating with Steve Jackson. Maybe we'll do that for the 40th anniversary. At our age it will probably take us ten years to write it!

Many thanks to Ian Livingstone. Find more gamebook news at his website, www.fightingfantasy.com



INSTANT EXPERT

Your simple primer to the biggest games, developers and franchises



In a brand new series, Retro Gamer gives you the tools to hold your own when discussing popular games, developers and franchises. This month: Fighting Fantasy

#1 FIGHTING FANTASY

THE Beginning

It all started with a quest. *The Magic Quest* to be precise. Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone were both big fans of *Dungeons & Dragons*, having sold it through their company Games Workshop. Realising that the role-playing game required a huge commitment on behalf of the players, they decided to come up with an alternative that would be more accessible and wouldn't require a large number of people to play.

The end result was *The Magic Quest*, an interactive novel that allowed you to make decisions, fight monsters, avoid traps and generally mould your own story. This was most notable in the way the book was sold to consumers, as it promised to be "A fighting fantasy gamebook in which YOU become the hero!"

The Magic Quest came about after a chance meeting with Penguin's commissioning editor, Geraldine Cooke, at a Games Day event in 1980. Her enthusiasm convinced Ian and Steve to work on a book, but they decided to create an interactive novel, instead of the book about the role-playing hobby she had originally requested.

It wasn't easy getting the mechanics to work, but the two friends managed to bond. The process itself was long and slow due to Puffin's inexperience with the new style of book, and the numerous requests for changes that were made. *The Magic Quest* was commissioned in August 1981, with Ian handling the first half and Steve concentrating on the second. A lot of the inspiration came from the pair's love of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

"*D&D* was certainly a big influence on our work," Ian told us. "*Lord Of The Rings*, as well. Being an avid science-fiction book reader and comic collector, those all had great influences on the story we ended up with. As we were keen to strip things down to bare role-playing game mechanics, we ended up with three attributes – skill, stamina and luck."

After a lengthy editing process, which saw the two distinct writing styles merged, inconsistencies corrected, and a name change to *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*, the book was finally published in August 1982, a year after it was originally commissioned. It became a huge success, thanks to appearing in *White Dwarf* magazine (which was owned by Livingstone and Jackson), and the Puffin Book Club. As word of mouth spread across schools, Puffin found itself having to constantly reprint the popular novel. Needless to say, more instalments were soon commissioned.

THE History

Thanks to the success of the original book, more titles quickly followed. Four books, including *The Forest Of Doom* and *City Of Thieves* were released in 1983, six titles – including the highly acclaimed *Deathtrap Dungeon* – appeared in 1984, while seven were released in 1985. The popularity and demand meant that it was impossible for Livingstone and Jackson to write every novel, and additional authors were chosen, including Jamie Thompson, Andrew Chapman and Luke Sharp. The duo took steps to ensure that the new authors' work didn't stray too far from the template they had originally created.

"Well, we put out parameters, not just on where they should locate their adventures, but we also had some areas and themes that we wanted to retain for Steve and me, and areas that worked well for our new writers as well," continues Ian. "Writers were given guidelines on genre and difficulty levels, as well as what they could and couldn't use. They couldn't use some of our monsters, for example, so while we guarded some of our own stuff, we wanted to assist them, and allow them to express themselves as much as possible through their own settings, stories and creatures."

For the most part, many of the adventures were set on the fictional world of Titan, although two novels did take place on Earth. It was a rich, diverse universe, allowing the pair to try all sorts of genres out, from science fiction to superhero tales. The series also introduced plenty of new ideas based on the core gameplay mechanics that had originally appeared in *Warlock*. Canny authors also started to look towards classic films for inspiration, further enhancing the appeal of the series. The 50th *Fighting Fantasy* book, *Return To Firetop Mountain*, was published in 1992, with Ian Livingstone once again on writing duties.

> "Demand meant that it was impossible for Livingstone and Jackson to write every novel"



THE LEGACY

Fighting Fantasy's legacy is a series that has sold over 14 million units, has been translated into over 30 different languages, and boasts 59 books under its original publisher. It also received numerous spin-offs in the form of Steve Jackson's four-part *Sorcery!*, several videogame adaptations of varying quality, a basic RPG adaptation called *Fighting Fantasy* (again by Steve Jackson) and a couple of board game adaptations (courtesy of Games Workshop). As noted elsewhere within this issue, this isn't the end of the *Fighting Fantasy* legacy, either, as a brand new book, *Blood Of The Zombies*, is currently being written by co-creator Ian Livingstone.

Even without this new book, the franchise has still generated a fitting legacy for a series that first sprung from a simple love of tabletop gaming.

BITE-SIZED INSTANT EXPERT

- ***Fighting Fantasy* was created by Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson.**
- The first book, *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain*, was originally called *The Magic Quest*.
- **The original idea stemmed from numerous sources, including *The Lord Of The Rings*, comic books and *Dungeons & Dragons*.**
- Publisher Puffin ended up printing 59 books, ending the series in 1995.
- **The franchise has sold over 14 million units and has been translated into over 30 different languages.**
- Numerous videogame conversions have appeared over the years, starting with the ZX Spectrum and ending with iOS.



Mosaic courtesy of Alex Eddy

#1 FIGHTING FANTASY

FIVE TO TRY

The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain

Book Number: 1 **Year Released:** 1982



The first book remains one of the best thanks to its tight scripting, interesting adversary (the warlock Zagor) and tense encounters. It's also fairly easy compared to later books, as there are few 'instant death scenarios'. Ian Livingstone wrote a sequel, *Return To Firetop Mountain,* in 1992, which at the time was to be the 50th book in the series.

Deathtrap Dungeon

Book Number: 6 **Year Released:** 1984



Widely regarded as one of the best books in the series, *Deathtrap Dungeon* is also one of the toughest, with fiendish traps, brutal monsters and a tricky maze to negotiate. Such was its popularity that it was turned into a videogame and received two sequels – the 1986 book *Trial Of Champions* and *Armies Of Death*, released in 1988.

House Of Hell

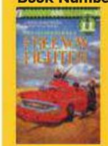
Book Number: 10 **Year Released:** 1984



Aside from being the only *Fighting Fantasy* book set in modern-day Earth, *House Of Hell* also introduced the Fear mechanic. Every time the character encounters disturbing events, they gain Fear points. If the maximum score is reached, they literally die of fright. A gripping adventure that taps into HP Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos.

Freeway Fighter

Book Number: 23 **Year Released:** 1985



Fighting fantasy books often took their inspiration from films and TV, and *Freeway Fighter* was no different. Set on a futuristic version of Earth, the *Mad Max*-styled novel sees players tear around in a heavily armoured vehicle to secure a fresh supply of petrol. It's notable for introducing the firepower mechanic to the long-running series.

Howl Of The Werewolf

Book Number: 29 **Year Released:** 2007



This isn't the original book 29 (that was *Midnight Rogue*) but instead the first original offering from new publisher Wizard Books, which took over publishing rights for the popular series of books. It's a great offering as well, with interesting new mechanics (depicting your change into a Werewolf) and a gripping storyline.

COMPUTER CONNECTIONS

There have been numerous videogame adaptations over the years, but only recent handheld efforts have truly captured the spirit of the original books…



The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain

System: ZX Spectrum
Year Released: 1984

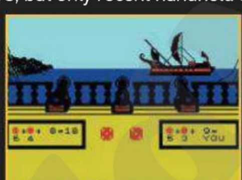
The *Fighting Fantasy* series didn't get off to a good digital start. The *Warlock Of Firetop Mountain* was a crude, simple-looking maze game, based on *Hall Of The Things*, which required you to find 15 keys.



The Forest Of Doom

System: ZX Spectrum
Year Released: 1984

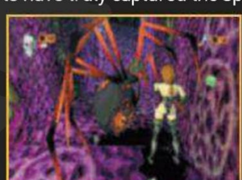
This is a surprisingly faithful adaptation of the third book in the series, which is effectively a prompted text adventure. The only real downside is that it takes an absolute age for the text to appear on-screen, making for a slow game.



Seas Of Blood

System: ZX Spectrum
Year Released: 1985

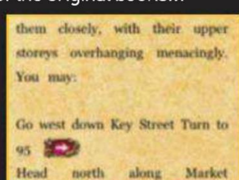
Unlike earlier Spectrum efforts, *Seas Of Blood* was an actual text adventure. It was a fairly good one as well, with a fun battle system and some enjoyable dialogue. But, like similar *Fighting Fantasy* conversions, it's let down by a clunky parser.



Deathtrap Dungeon

System: PC/PlayStation
Year Released: 1998

This third-person adventure is ambitious. But though it's filled with imaginative traps and monsters, it suffers from a poor camera, unimpressive visuals and some stodgy controls. It's a great concept though, and we'd love to see it attempted in today's market.



Fighting Fantasy: City Of Thieves

System: iOS
Year Released: 2009

iOS is the perfect medium for *Fighting Fantasy* games, with five titles released so far. Great illustrations, along with sensible controls and simple mechanics, make them perfect adaptations to dip in and out of.

Out To Lunch

A PLATFORMER WITH PLENTY OF INGREDIENTS

» RETROREVIVAL



» MINDSCAPE INC.
» SUPER NINTENDO
» 1993

Think *Zoo Keeper* meets *Burger Time* and you've pretty much got the concept of *Out To Lunch*, an enjoyable platformer that sees a harassed cartoon gastronomist named Pierre le Chef in a race to catch some badly behaved ingredients.

On each level, Pierre must locate his net before he can hunt his ingredients, which have become self-aware and have escaped his cooking pot. They're crafty, too; the second they spot Pierre they will instantly try to evade capture, so timing your approach is essential if you want a complete recipe.

Why Pierre just doesn't buy lifeless ingredients from the local supermarket is anyone's guess. Perhaps intelligent food just tastes better. Whatever the reason, once Pierre has collected up enough ingredients and has deposited them in his cage (a little strange), this unlocks a doorway that will lead him to the next level.

As Pierre progresses through the game, later levels require him to capture a larger number of ingredients and also contend with some annoying enemies, including nasty bacteria that infect any ingredients they come in contact with, making them deadly to Pierre. There's also a rival chef named Noir who occasionally rears his head and makes a mad dash towards the cage to open it up and release all the edibles he's collected. Thankfully, Pierre has the ability to vanquish his enemies and stun the ingredients by stomping on them, making his shopping list easier to complete. He also has a decent assortment of weapons, including a wooden spoon that he can use as a melee weapon, a bag of flour that can be thrown and a golden apron that grants him temporary invincibility.

If we have any criticisms of *Out To Lunch*, they're that the pace is slow and the level design is a bit on the bland side. It would have definitely benefitted from a bit of pepping up. But with plenty of levels, and some challenging gameplay, there's plenty of enjoyable platforming action here to consume. *



RETRORATED



>> After months of waiting, Kid Icarus: Uprising is finally with us, and it's great fun as well. We also revisit Silent Hill in the form of Downpour and a new HD collection, and watch Street Fighter and Tekken go at it in their long-awaited face-off

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Kid Icarus: Uprising
I'm finding this impossible to put down, even if being left-handed makes it awkward.



STUART
Street Fighter X Tekken
Despite disappointing online, this is a fantastic crossover with rich and robust fighting.



DAVID
Silent Hill: Downpour
It's no *Silent Hill 2*, but this is a surprisingly effective sequel with some strong moments.

Kid Icarus: Uprising

NINTENDO BREATHES FRESH NEW LIFE INTO ONE OF ITS OLDEST FRANCHISES

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £34.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** PROJECT SORA
- » **PLAYERS:** 1 (2-6 ONLINE)

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Kid Icarus* made its Famicom debut in 1986 and saw protagonist Pit seeking out three sacred treasures. Directed by Satoru Okada, it would be a further five years before a sequel arrived in the form of the Game Boy's *Kid Icarus: Of Myths And Monsters*. The franchise has since lain dormant for 21 long years, despite fan demand, until the release of *Uprising*.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
KID ICARUS (NES)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
SIN & PUNISHMENT: SUCCESSOR OF THE SKIES (WII)





After a lengthy gestation period, which saw its release pushed back several times, *Kid Icarus* finally returns, and, bar some slight control issues, it's everything we were hoping for.

From the moment Pit jauntily addresses you, to the climactic boss encounter, it's clear that a huge amount of love and attention has been poured into *Kid Icarus: Uprising*. It looks absolutely sensational, with dramatic sweeping vistas, exceptional use of 3D and some truly awe-inspiring lighting effects and boss encounters. *Star Fox 64 3D*'s 3D effect felt a little flat in places, but here it's surprisingly effective, causing you to duck your head as lasers, enemies and immovable obstacles leap out of the screen towards you.

Kid Icarus: Uprising also boasts a truly sublime soundtrack, with dramatic, sweeping orchestral scores that suit the on-screen action perfectly. It's assembled in the same way as the *Smash Bros* games, so it's basically a who's who of Japanese videogame musicians and is filled with variety. The voice acting is less impressive, smacking of a Saturday morning kids' show, but the scripting itself is excellent, with genuinely amusing banter, and lots of fan service to the original game. Dialogue is wisely moved to the bottom screen, while cute pixel reproductions of original monsters and bosses further back up *Kid Icarus: Uprising*'s status as a real labour of love.

The original *Kid Icarus* was an excellent, underrated game that cleverly blended different genres, something that *Uprising* also replicates, but via different game styles. *Uprising* is split into two distinct styles: an on-rails *Sin & Punishment*-style shooter, where you move with the analogue stick and control your aiming reticle with the stylus, and on-foot stages that are often set in dangerous mazes and require you to use a similar control setup.

The controls are very clunky, and especially annoying if you're left-handed. The annoying thing is that, while *Kid Icarus: Uprising* does support the newly released Circle Pad Pro, you can't assign aiming to the second stick, which would have greatly improved the controls. You can only use the right stick for movement, despite Nintendo letting you assign the left stick to the aiming reticle. It's as if Nintendo





» [3DS] The land sections feature numerous vehicles that Pit can use. They take a while to get used to but are very powerful.



» [3DS] Bosses are plentiful and put up vicious fights, particularly if Intensity is high.





» [3DS] The Intensity bar not only determines difficulty, but also allows you access to certain areas if your intensity is high enough.



Battle royale

WE'RE NOT NORMALLY big fans of single-player games that are adapted for multiplayer – just look at *Metroid Prime 2*. *Kid Icarus: Uprising* keeps things simple by offering three-player teams or simple free-for-alls that are huge amounts of fun to play. This is mainly due to the loadouts that can be taken into each arena, which allow for huge amounts of customisation and greatly affect the way you play. Designer Masahiro Sakurai is heavily involved with the *Smash Bros* franchise, so it should come as no surprise to learn that the multiplayer skirmishes of *Uprising* are just as frenetic and fast-paced. Best of all, though, is the excellent netcode, which makes both local and online games a joy to play.

purposely omitted it because it highlights just how important that second stick is for certain games. You do get used to the fiddly controls eventually, but it's rather telling that Nintendo actually supplies a stand in order to make gameplay more comfortable. The stylus setup is arguably more useful when moving around on foot, as you can swipe and touch the screen to spin and hold the camera as needed, but it's frustrating that the controls require so much mastery, when other suitable options could have been made available.

It's a pity that the controls will be such a barrier to some, as *Kid Icarus: Uprising* is fantastic fun to play, mainly because there's simply so much to do in it. The core shooting mechanics of the flying levels are extremely robust, giving you challenging waves and tricky obstacles to negotiate. There's also a clever difficulty setting called the Intensity gauge that goes from 0-9. Increasing this Intensity bar drains you of precious hearts (*Kid Icarus*' currency) and raises the difficulty of the stage, but also increases the chances of good rewards while you play. It's a clever risk and reward system that offers plenty of longevity and really highlights *Uprising*'s robust scoring mechanics. The Intensity bar goes down with each death as well, meaning there's always an additional incentive to go back to a stage and try to complete it in one sitting.

The on-foot sections don't play as well as the flying sequences, but even these pull you in, as the levels themselves are well designed, imaginative and packed with hidden areas and seemingly inaccessible chests, the most secret of which typically hide the best rewards.

Longevity is further enhanced by the sheer number of weapons and powers that main hero Pit can collect. As with loot games like *Diablo*, they range in rarity and power, and cover everything from bows to swords and gigantic cannons. Weapons can be bought or sold with hearts, and combined to create even more outlandish variations. Experimentation is the key to success in *Uprising*, as you'll constantly want to retool Pit to see if new loadouts will improve your overall score.

And that's the real beauty of *Kid Icarus: Uprising*. Even with its niggly controls, it remains a genuinely enchanting game with masses of replay value, a huge number of levels to get through, and loving respect for the source material. A new *Kid Icarus* game has been a long time coming, but the 21-year delay has certainly proven worth the wait. It's quite simply one of the finest reboots we've ever experienced.

OPINION



Though the control issues will grate with many, this is still one of the best action titles for the 3DS. The action is satisfying, the visuals and music are superb with some really effective 3D, there's plenty of fan service, and there's loads to unlock too. It even manages to be funny at points. Nintendo has delivered the 3DS goods once again with the best *Kid Icarus* game to date.

Stuart Hunt



✱ GO DEEPER

Kid Icarus: Uprising

>> ***Kid Icarus: Uprising*** **is the first game from new development studio Project Sora. Its next game will be the new** ***Super Smash Bros.***

>> **Each copy of** ***Kid Icarus: Uprising*** **includes a plastic stand designed to make the game easier to play.**

>> **There are some neat Street Pass features, which allow you to trade weapons with others.**

» [3DS] Grind rails are used on the ground stages to allow Pit to easily access certain areas.

In a nutshell

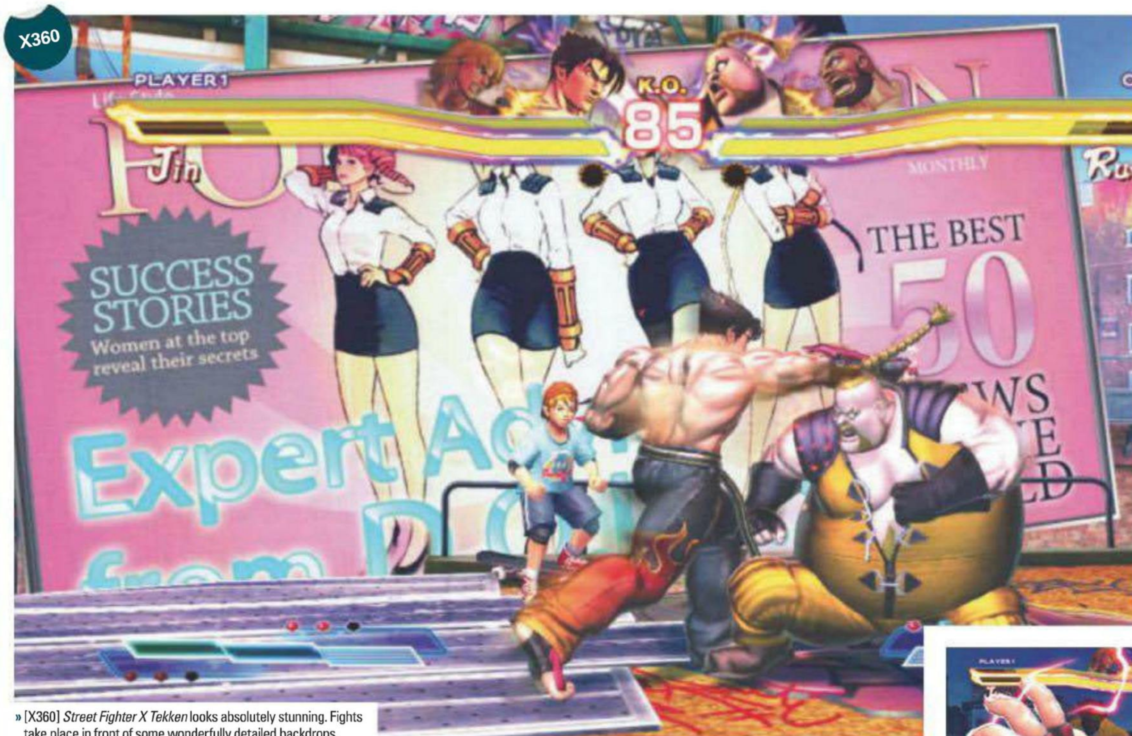
Yes, *Kid Icarus: Uprising*'s controls aren't perfect, but in terms of resurrecting a classic gaming franchise, you're unlikely to see any other developer do a better job this year.

>> Score **88%**

» [3DS] There are a huge number of different items to discover that greatly enhance Pit's skills.



X360



» [X360] *Street Fighter X Tekken* looks absolutely stunning. Fights take place in front of some wonderfully detailed backdrops.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind *Street Fighter X Tekken*

>> The X360 version will have a total of 50 playable fighters, while the PS3 will have 55. The Vita version features all 55 fighters from the outset.

>> Namco and Capcom have joined forces before, back in 2005 for action/tactical RPG *Capcom X Tekken* on PS2.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

CAPCOM VS. SNK: MILLENNIUM FIGHT 2000



▽ SOMETHING NEW

ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3





» [X360] The *Tekken* contingent slot into the *Street Fighter* universe smoothly.

BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN EACH OTHER

Street Fighter X Tekken



Despite their violent pasts, and recent hullabaloo surrounding the release, *Street Fighter X Tekken* is a pretty harmonious marriage. Indeed, even if you're spitting flames about incoming DLC hiding on the disc, and the absence of Pac-Man, Mega Man and local team battle mode from the X360 version of the game, you'll still be won over by its deep combat and how successfully it is in making this partnership work.

Running from the *Street Fighter IV* engine, tonally *Street Fighter X Tekken* feels rooted more in *Street Fighter* gameplay than it does *Tekken*, but the Namco contingent slot into their new 2.5D skins comfortably. Things are balanced out somewhat through a fighting system with a focus on *Tekken Tag*-style teamwork, air juggling, and combo chaining. If you're coming at this from either franchise, certain elements will feel familiar but skill at one will only get you so far as there is so much to learn and master here.

Combat is further enhanced by the Cross Gauge, a three-tier meter which builds up during the fight and can be used to actuate a dizzying amount of impressive attacks, from EX Special Moves and Super Arts, which are effectively *SFIV*'s Ultra Combos, Cross Arts (the team equivalent), to Cross Assaults, which momentarily lets you control both fighters at the same time. Add in Pandora, a desperation move that lets you sacrifice one of your exhausted fighters to give the other a temporary power boost, and gems that can be assigned to your fighter to enhance their power and offer control assistance, opening up myriad customisation opportunities, and you can really begin to appreciate how robust the fighting is.

There is one problem though. Currently the package is marred by an often flaky online component. As well as the fact you cannot instant rematch, which is just bizarre, the current net code seems to have real latency issues. In the ranked bouts that we played, sound would frequently drop in and out and there were noticeable lag and frame rate problems too. It's a shame as everything else is superb and shows that a real effort has been made here. Hopefully the issue gets sorted out soon, as we're confident it has the potential to be as rich an experience online as it is offline.

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** X360
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, PS VITA, PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £49.99
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Following the popularity of *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* and *Marvel Super Heroes*, the Capcom versus series of fighters first began with the release of *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* in 1996. Since then, Capcom heroes from a whole multitude of franchises have tussled with the best of *SNK*, *Tatsunoko* and *Namco*.



OPINION



There are certainly issues with the online portion of Capcom's game, but the gameplay mechanics throughout are truly excellent. The integration of *Tekken* characters really has to be admired, while the gorgeous engine and great character roster allows for true fan service.

Darran Jones

In a Nutshell

It's the deepest, most grounded and sophisticated fighter Capcom has released this generation. If it sorts out the online issues it could be its best.

>> **Score 84%**



Silent Hill: Downpour

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £49.99
» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI » **DEVELOPER:** VATRA GAMES » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> ***Silent Hill: Shattered** Dreams* proved that it was possible for a Western developer to recapture the magic of the early *Silent Hill* games. Sadly, Vatra Games has been unable to emulate Climax's success.

Silent Hill Downpour tries hard, but it's just not that scary. The combat, while clumsy, is in keeping with the *Silent Hill* style, while the music is startlingly effective adding to *Downpour*'s oppressive atmosphere. However, main protagonist Murphy Pendleton is a dull hero, and enemies lack the freakiness of earlier villains.

Puzzles are well thought out for the most part, but *Downpour* suffers from numerous technical issues, uninteresting characters, and a lack of much-needed frights. It's certainly a better effort than *Homecoming*, but it falls short of the games found on Konami's HD collection.

>> Score **66%**

Silent Hill HD Collection

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £29.99
» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI » **DEVELOPER:** HIJINX STUDIOS » **PLAYERS:** 1



>> **After Bluepoint Games'** HD update of *Metal Gear*, we were hoping for similar things for Konami's *Silent Hill* franchise. Unfortunately, we haven't received it. There's no doubting the quality of the two games (although it's a mystery why others from the series weren't included) but the conversion itself isn't up to the standard we were expecting. Graphical effects and numerous textures are missing, there are occasional frame-rate issues, particularly on *Silent Hill 3*, while stuttery load times impact on certain cut-scenes.

Nonetheless, *Silent Hill 2* remains superb, with great characterisation, strong dialogue and adult themes that haven't been bettered. *Silent Hill 3* is also decent, but pales next to its predecessor. This collection can't replace the originals, but it's a solid entry point for anyone new to the franchise.

>> Score **70%**

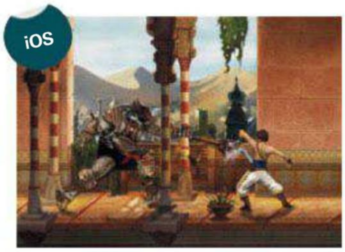


BlazBlue Continuum Shift Extend

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS VITA » **ALSO ON:** XBOX 360/PS3 » **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **This latest *BlazBlue*** looks simply astonishing, with mesmerising animation and sumptuous backgrounds. Gameplay is also impressive, with a huge number of different gameplay modes, solid online play, and a mass of characters to learn. It's a truly outstanding port that is accessible to new players, but offers incredibly deep gameplay for veterans. The only real downside is that many combos are far too technical for the Vita's D-pad.

>> Score **84%**



Prince Of Persia Classic

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IOS » **ALSO ON:** XBOX 360/PS3 » **PRICE:** £1.49 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **This is an** update of the Xbox Live Arcade release, which itself was an update of Jordan Mechner's original game with a *Sands Of Time* skin. As with the original (which was also ported to iOS) this update is surprisingly successful due to being highly responsive. You'll be let down by the virtual controls on occasion, but for the most part they work well. A selection of additional gameplay modes including Survival and Time Attack seal the deal.

>> Score **70%**



Retro Racing

» **SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO ON:** NA
» **PRICE:** £0.69 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> ***Qwak* creator Jamie** Woodhouse has created this overhead racer for iOS. The controls are simple but responsive, with one button to accelerate and two for movement. Taking your finger off the screen slows you down, and you can use this to powerslide around the cleverly designed courses. Power-ups are plentiful; the AI of other cars is extremely solid, while it benefits from a fun multiplayer mode. Without a lengthy campaign mode it's a little lacking in meat, but it's a lot of old-school fun for just 69 pennies.

>> Score **80%**



Mario Party 9

» **SYSTEM:** Wii » **ALSO ON:** NA
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **We still fondly** remember the original N64 games, but increasingly weak sequels are damaging our love of this series. The biggest issue that *Mario Party 9* has is a distinct feeling of déjà vu, even though new developer Nd Cube has made numerous subtle changes to the core gameplay. Many of the included mini-games riff off previous titles, and while there are a large number of them, they often feel way too similar to past offerings. *Mario Party 9* remains fun, especially for younger gamers, but it's in dire need of a proper revamp.

>> Score **65%**

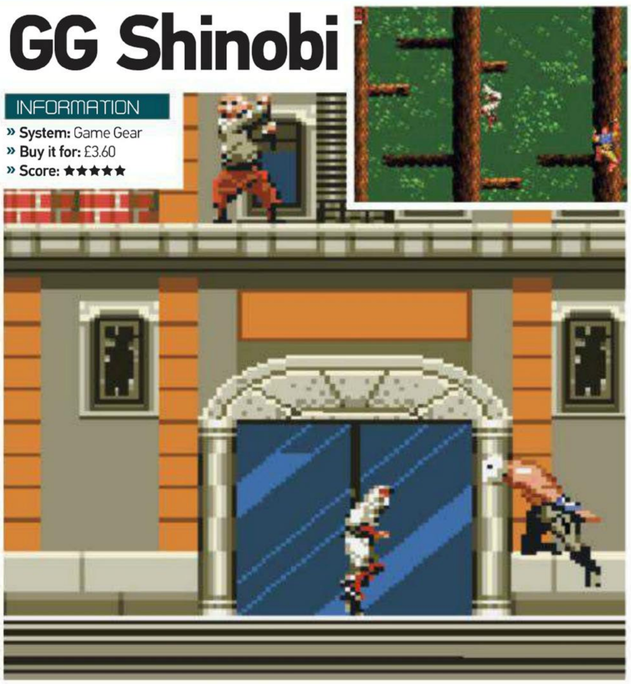
RETROROUND-UP



>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

GG Shinobi



INFORMATION
- » **System:** Game Gear
- » **Buy it for:** £3.60
- » **Score:** ★★★★★

It's taken a fair while, but Sega has finally released its first few Game Gear games for the 3DS's Virtual Console service. While the current trio of released games is something of a mixed bag, it does include the brilliant *GG Shinobi*.

If you've never played it before, you're in for a treat, as it's an excellent spin on core *Shinobi* gameplay. You initially start off playing as series regular Joe Musashi, but you'll soon come into contact with brainwashed ninjas who will eventually fight on your side after you've defeated them. This is important, because each rescued ninja has their own distinct weapons, which greatly changes how you can tackle each level.

The ability to switch between different shinobi on the fly in order to use their distinct abilities, and the freedom to tackle the first four stages as you wish really makes *GG Shinobi* stand apart from its peers, and while it's insanely tough in places, it never feels unfair. This is a great addition to any Virtual Console collection and is ideally suited for mobile play. Here's hoping that Sega releases the equally good sequel sooner rather than later.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



The Whispered World
- » **System:** SNES
- » **Buy it for:** $14.99
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

» Not just a pretty face; dive into the truly stunning 2D visuals and you'll discover *The Whispered World* to be a fantastic tribute to the adventure games of the 16-bit period. Clearly influenced by the likes of LucasArts and Adventure Soft, it's an enjoyable romp that places you in the shoes of a young circus clown called Sadwick. The humour feels a little forced at times, but the charming story and clever puzzles will keep you playing until the very end.



The Simpsons Arcade Game
- » **System:** PSN
- » **Buy it for:** £7.99
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

» We can only imagine the licensing hoops that had to be jumped through to get this back. We're glad it's happened, though, as *The Simpsons Arcade Game* remains a lot of fun to play, even if it does get a little samey. Playing as Bart, Lisa, Marge or Homer, you fight your way through Springfield. This is a decent update, with different regional versions of the game and a fun survival mode where you must get as far as you can on a single credit.



Shock Troopers
- » **System:** Arcade
- » **Buy it for:** £5.49
- » **Score:** ★★★★★

» Quite why PSP and PSN versions of Neo Geo games aren't interchangeable, we'll never know. What we do know, though, is that *Shock Troopers* is one of the best run-and-gun games that money can buy. It's worth noting that, like many PSP Neo Geo games, it is available on a compilation, but there's no denying the sheer adrenaline rush that *Shock Troopers* delivers all by itself, and for a little over £5, that's incredibly good value.



Shinobi
- » **System:** PlayStation 2
- » **Buy it for:** £7.99
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

» Two *Shinobi* games this month and they couldn't be more different. While *GG Shinobi* is a clever riff on the core *Shinobi* mechanics, this PS2 outing saw Sega tackle the third dimension with admittedly mixed results. Boss encounters are enjoyable, and the emphasis on chaining attacks to increase your score multiplier is a nice touch, but the bland level design and infuriating camera really let it down. A decent, if not spectacular, addition to the series.

▼ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Aside from a trio of Game Gear games, it's been a fairly quiet month for Virtual Console owners.

Mega Man 5
- » **System:** NES
- » **Buy it for:** 500 Points
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

Dragon Crystal
- » **System:** Game Gear
- » **Buy it for:** £2.70
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Sonic The Hedgehog: Triple Trouble
- » **System:** Game Gear
- » **Buy it for:** £4.50
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Mega Man: Dr Wily's Revenge
- » **System:** Game Boy
- » **Buy it for:** £3.60
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆



▼ PSN

SNK is slowly start to crank out its back catalogue again, for both PSP and PSN owners.

Metal Slug 2
- » **System:** Arcade
- » **Buy it for:** £7.29 (PSN)
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

Arc The Lad II
- » **System:** PlayStation
- » **Buy it for:** £3.59
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

The King Of Fighters '96
- » **System:** Arcade
- » **Buy it for:** £7.29 (PSN)
- » **Score:** ★★★★★

World Heroes
- » **System:** Arcade
- » **Buy it for:** £5.49 (PSP)
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆



▼ PC SERVICES

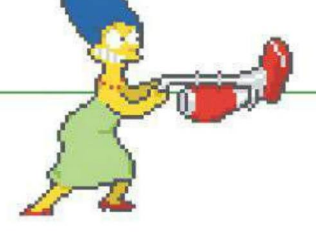
Plenty of new games from GOG, and all of them with a cool retro theme. Lovely stuff.

Machinarium: Collector's Edition
- » **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.29)
- » **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

Treasure Adventure Game
- » **Buy it for:** Free
- » **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

Screamer
- » **Buy it for:** €5.99
- » **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
- » **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

Trine
- » **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.29)
- » **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆



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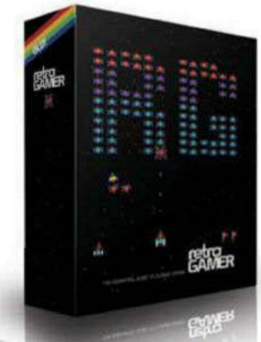
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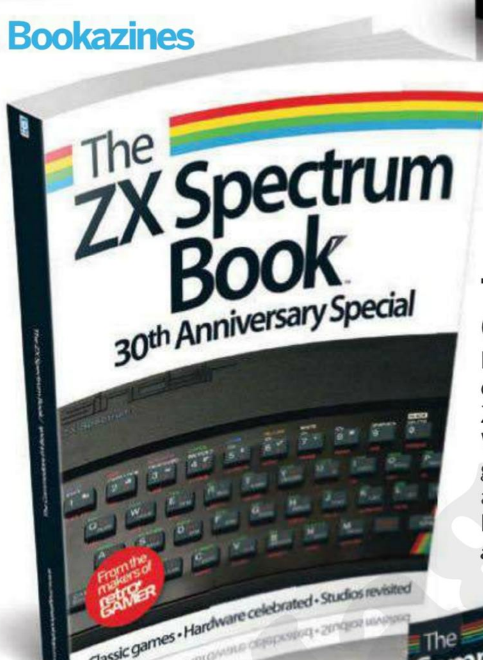
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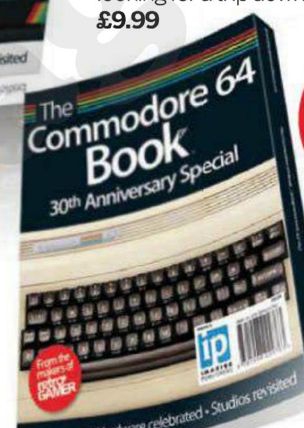
Bookazines



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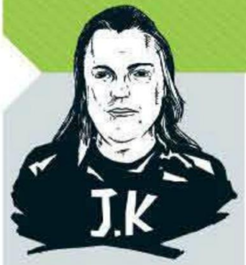
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HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



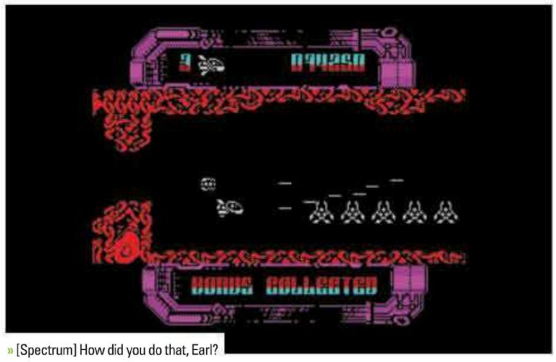
So More Tea, Vicar? has been released… My general interest in 8-bit homebrew began around the time it was first announced, and it along with three other titles have been a holy grail since then. One of those three was the now-released Space Harrier on the Atari 8-bit, so that leaves Pinball Dreams and Grubz, both for the C64, before I need to find something new to wait for!

MORE TEA, VICAR?

ANYONE FANCY A BIT OF A BREW?



» [Spectrum] What would you say to a cup, father?



» [Spectrum] How did you do that, Earl?

The story behind the bizarrely titled *More Tea, Vicar?* is one of a man of the cloth with a spaceship and a sideline in black market tea, roaring through uncharted space, to the home planet of a species that loves a drop of Earl Grey to the point where they'll literally kill to get it. At least that's what developer Jonathan Cauldwell told us via the *Your Sinclair* special bundled with Retro Gamer issue 9, and yes, that does mean we've been waiting for quite some time now to play this. Close to a decade, in fact!

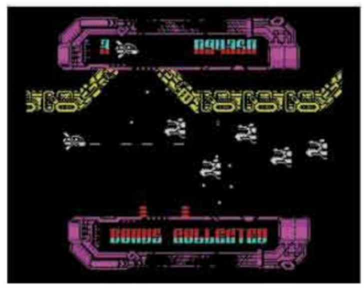
The battle for tannin takes place over four horizontally scrolling levels and, while the reverend's spaceship isn't particularly well equipped to begin with, handy power-ups are left behind whenever a complete wave of enemies is dispatched. The fully armed craft has some serious forward firepower, a weaker but still handy rear cannon, shields, a support drone at its side, and a more powerful but slower to fire secondary weapon launched by holding the button down for a moment.

The graphics are excellent throughout, with loads of detail and colour splashed about the smoothly scrolling landscapes, and lots of thought has obviously gone into everything on screen to make sure that the dreaded colour clash barely rears its head. The stage maps are also reasonably long – in part because everything moves at a sedate pace that is unusual for a shoot-'em-up – and offer quite a bit of variety, along with some tricky sections.

After a particularly long wait, the playable preview, some impressive screenshots of Javier Alcaniz's in-game graphics, and Jonathan Cauldwell's Shoot 'Em Up Designer whetting everybody's appetite a few years ago as well, it was difficult not to have high expectations when looking at *More Tea, Vicar?*, but it does manage to deliver. In fact, it offers up an impressive package that's possibly up there with scrolling shooter greats for the Spectrum like *Zynaps* or, dare we say it, even *R-Type*. The only real complaint we had was about the overall size; this isn't a multi-loader and there are only four levels included, with one of those being a bonus stage. And, although there are some nasty bits where there's very little room to manoeuvre and the enemies are hogging most of it, those points only require a little memorisation of where to dodge rather than going for kills before it's fairly easy for seasoned players to bludgeon their way through the entire game.

That and little presentational niggles like the lack of even a congratulatory message on making it to the end or the subsequent loops not increasing in difficulty are slightly irksome considering how well put together the rest of *More Tea, Vicar?* is. But the game is as enjoyable as we've come to expect from Jonathan Cauldwell, reasonably challenging for most players, and gorgeous too. It's just that *More Tea, Vicar?* came in a cup and we were hoping for a mug.

92%

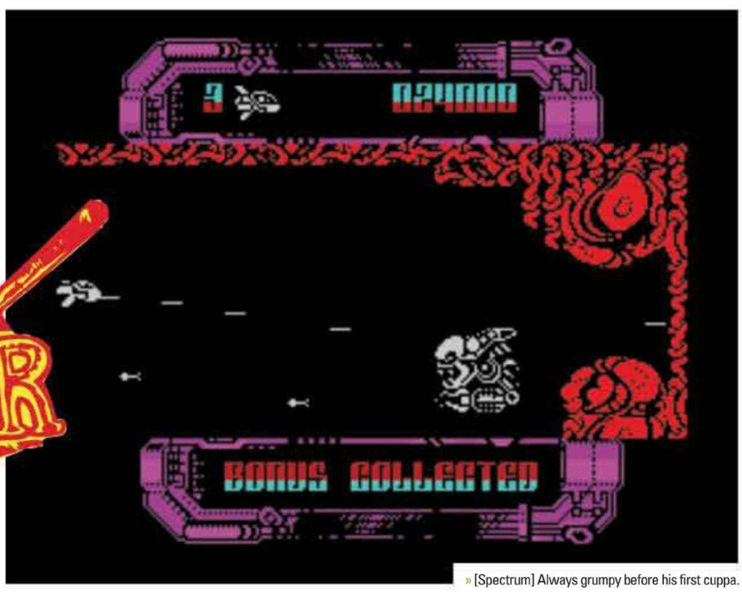


» [Spectrum] Go on, go on, go on!



» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPED BY:** JONATHAN CAULDWELL
» **LINK:** CRONOSOFT.CO.UK
» **PRICE:** TBA
» **REVIEWED BY:** JASON KELK

retro GAMER SIZZLER



» [Spectrum] Always grumpy before his first cuppa.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

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retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

MR BEANBAG

» **FORMAT:** AGA AMIGA » **DEVELOPER:** JIGSAW LOUNGE AND GLASTONBRIDGE » **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/BEANBAG-AMIGA » **PRICE:** FREE



» [Amiga] Is anyone else hungry?

Mr Fizzypop has been kidnapped by the dastardly Count Gazpacho, and only Mr Beanbag can save him – although quite why nobody else with, say, arms and legs wouldn't be more suited to the job is never established. The action is reminiscent of the first two *Sonic The Hedgehog* games, with large and colourful graphics throughout the sprawling levels. Mr B is a cutesy bag of fun with a face that somehow always looks straight at the 'camera', and enemies are a grumpier version of the same cuteness.

Mr Beanbag is fun but tough. The collisions are surprisingly harsh for a fast platformer, and, although collecting the jellybeans around the stage offers a little protection against bumping into enemies, getting through takes some time. Fortunately, there's a continue system that makes *Mr Beanbag*'s 40-level rescue mission more manageable and indeed enjoyable.

80%

DRIAR

» **FORMAT:** NES » **DEVELOPER:** STEFAN ADOLFSSON AND DAVID ERIKSSON » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DRIAR-NES » **PRICE:** FREE

Some of the controls in *Driar* for the NES initially seem quirky; pressing left or right on the D-pad moves the titular lead in the appropriate direction and A makes him jump, but if B is held down, the horizontal speed is doubled. For the earliest levels that feels odd since there isn't a point where not moving quickly seems appropriate, but on later stages the more precise control is a must.

The screens also wrap around at the edges, and many of the levels are designed so that utilising this feature is a requirement for completing them. The resulting gameplay feels reminiscent of the Mojon Twins' *Uwol: Quest For Money* – the authors have acknowledged this with a thank you to the Mojons on their website – which is no bad thing. *Driar* is a simple but effective platformer with a good difficulty curve and lots of perplexing levels.

83%

» [NES] Just a loner out there on your own.





» [MSX] Make city parking easier with a mech!



» [MSX] It's not about size.

MECHA 8

» **FORMAT:** MSX » **DEVELOPER:** ÓSCAR TOLEDO GUTIÉRREZ
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MSXDEV-2011-STATUS » **PRICE:** FREE

The world of 2078 is threatened by aliens, so humanity's only hope are Mechas, 15-metre assault robots that can stomp along the ground or fly at up to Mach 1. Mecha 8 has just rolled off the production line and is in need of a pilot, so step forward Tricia Thunder to take it into battle.

Mecha 8 has some well-drawn graphics during play, but there are a few visibility issues when flying over the busier backgrounds – the city on the first level in particular – where distinguishing enemies proves difficult to the point where it's a challenge getting through the early stages.

Mecha 8 doesn't feel like the MSX shoot-'em-ups we're used to; it has a large player object with shields, sensitive collision detection and some despicable attack patterns, but get those waves memorised and learn to love the shield gauge, and it offers five levels of solid blasting.

76%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Videopac] Not the colour clash we were thinking of!

>> Clash of the titans

Philips Videopac and Odyssey 2 developer Revival Studios has released a new game called *Colorclash*. Goodies include online high-score tables and rewards, high-resolution backgrounds on Videopac+ machines and, if a The Voice module is present, digitised speech. There's a limited run of 100 cartridges, but hopefully it'll be available in another form. Have a look at **www.revival-studios.com** for more details.



» [C16] That's just super!

>> Brother, can you spare a coin?

Originally written at the end of the Eighties, resurrected during the mid-Nineties, and finally resuscitated again this year, *Galli* is a C16 platformer inspired by *Super Mario Bros.* At the moment everything is up in the air since the developer is looking for artists and musicians to work with, but hopefully a final version will be released soon. **kikstart.eu/galli-c16** takes you to the holding page.



» [C64] That's the sound of the beast.

>> Increased policing

SEUCK legend Alf Yngve has been busy again, this time working on a last instalment for his *COPS* series. *COPS: The Final Chapter* is a scrolling and shooting extravaganza that's nearly complete and will arrive with new, enhanced versions of its predecessors. We've got an exclusive screenshot courtesy of Alf himself, and wannabe officers should keep an eye on **www.psytronik.net** for further information.

HOMEBREW

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> The ultimate printer jam

When we reviewed the original *Attanck!* in issue 95, we found it to be a reasonable shoot-'em-up hiding behind an ASCII veneer. The recently released *Attanck! 3* is more of the same, with retro printer-styled graphics, and controls bearing a resemblance to Namco's *Assault*. We've given it a quick play and so far aren't sure if it's an actual sequel or more an upgrade to the original game. **kikstart.eu/attanck3-xblig** goes to *Attanck! 3*'s Xbox Live Indie Games page.



>> Something's happening here today

Another new release is *The Impossible Dungeon*, a quirky game that's half RPG and half Choose Your Own Adventure, delivered over a split-screen display. The game itself is driven by the story, and the dialogue, which spends a lot of time recounting arguments between party members, is more than a little cheesy, but why not take a peek over at **kikstart.eu/dungeon-xblig** if you like a spot of text-based adventuring.



FLASH BOREDOM

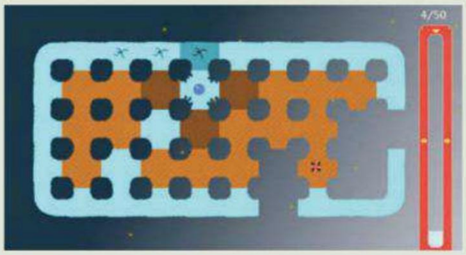


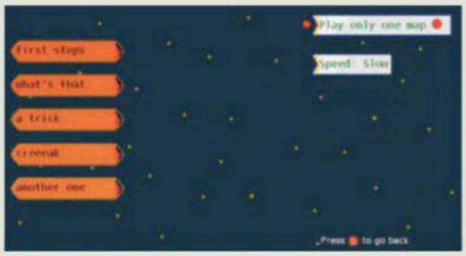
Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on ***Retro Gamer***'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Miniboat Racers.**

This game takes a giant leaf out of the Micro Machines book; take small toy vehicles, race them around tracks surrounded by items usually found in the back garden, and throw in just enough physics to make things fun! Sadly there's no multiplayer mode, but it's still pretty enjoyable.

www.kikstart.eu/miniboat-flash

XBOX LIVE INDIE GAMES ROUND-UP





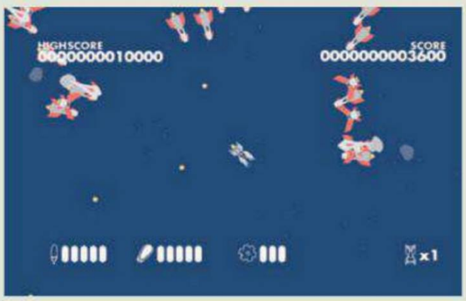
BRITTLE



» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BRITTLE-XBLIG

Fans of C64 action puzzle game *Sensitive* should find something to like in *Brittle*. The objective is to destroy chunks of the level to build up a gauge that runs down the right of the screen, and that's done simply by rolling over tiles. As the title suggests, they'll only survive a few passes from your rolling representation before shattering to dust, and that destruction gauge won't fill itself if the ball gets stuck in a corner.

There are mobile enemies to watch out for as well, but they don't actively touch and kill the player, instead trapping them in corners with nowhere to go. Overall, *Brittle* is fun but seems to be significantly tougher than titles like the already-difficult *Sensitive*, and it isn't particularly inspiring to look at, so we're going to advise potential players to give the available demo version a try before buying.



STARFIGHTER 2-9

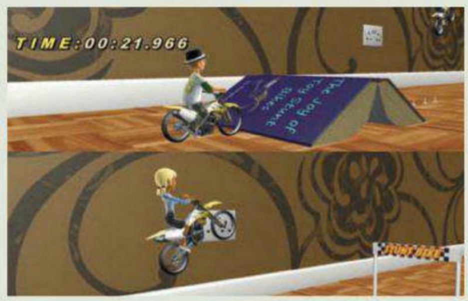


» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SF29-XBLIG

The word that springs to mind about *Starfighter 2-9* is 'uninspired'. It's yet another twin-stick shooter, and that's a crowded market to begin with, but this doesn't stand out by bringing anything exciting to the table or even dishing up its main course with any flair. Instead we're offered bland graphics and a generic dance soundtrack.

We like a good shoot-'em-up as much as the next person, but the sheer volume available via Xbox Live Indie Games and the high quality of those at the top end of the spectrum just make weaker ones like this look even worse. If you haven't already got one of these, get something like *Mimi In The Sky* or *SYNSO* instead, because they have so much more to offer.





TOY STUNT BIKE 2



» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/TOY-STUNT-2-XBLIG

Most kids probably built ramps around the house for their toy cars, using whatever toys, books or even furniture was to hand. *Toy Stunt Bike 2* does the same thing, but with the player's Avatar and a toy motorcycle riding tracks that have been assembled in three rooms of a house.

Each track offers three challenge cups for score handed out for stunts, time taken and how many of the three flags within the level are grabbed; collecting all the cups for each stage usually requires more than one attempt and isn't something that players should expect to do immediately, but there's a split-screen mode allowing two players to wipe out spectacularly together and a slightly fiddly but workable track designer included to extend the experience a little further.

Toy Stunt Bike 2 can be amusing. The physics are more about fun than realism, and taking to the skies is a common occurrence. With practice, it's possible to flip insane somersaults off open laptops, send phones and pizza boxes flying with a wheelie, or misjudge a ramp so the bike ends up falling into a flushing toilet – although that last one's more amusing than skilful.

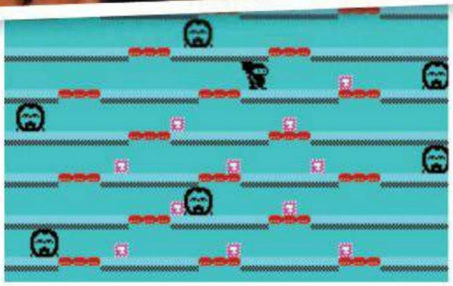


ENDLESS FORMS MOST BEAUTIFUL

Last issue we took a look at Endless Forms Most Beautiful – or EFMB for short – and noted some similarities to developer David Hughes' first Spectrum game, Stamp Quest, so we decided to find out a bit more about this new release and its heritage

Retro Gamer: *EFMB* reminded us greatly of your first game, *Stamp Quest*. Was it meant as a sequel or a full re-imagining?
David Hughes: A full re-imagining. I didn't like the idea of doing a sequel, but I did have some unfinished business with *Stamp Quest*. It had a raw look and feel that I don't think I will ever be able to capture again, but there were aspects of the gameplay and code that I wanted to revisit. The idea of *EFMB* was to produce a simple, addictive game that was so varied you didn't get bored of it. Although the Spectrum colour set is pretty limited, the theory is that you should never see the same screen twice

RG: And how satisfied were you with the result?
DH: I've been playing it regularly, so that must be a good sign, though I still can't complete it with a 100 per cent success record! I still eagerly watch for what kind of imp or space invader the pseudorandom engine has generated – my favourite so far is the Cuddlecatcher. However, my sprite routine could be better, and there is a bug in the timings for the rainbow graphics on non-48K models. Oh, and there's a typo I need to correct. Most of the disappointments are in the way I wrote the program; I'm still tying myself in knots and doing disorganised code. Thankfully these are the bits the player doesn't see.



» [Spectrum] Moebius' first outing, *Stamp Quest*.



» [Spectrum] Got the collecting bug.



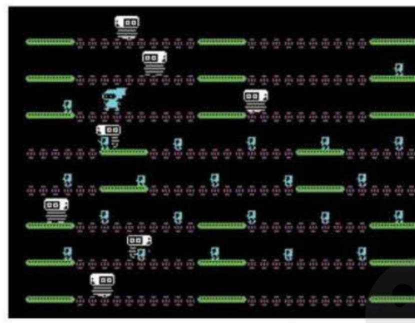
» [Spectrum] There are ten kinds of people…

RG: There's a lot of detail to *EFMB*. Was making it fit a challenge, and did you manage to include everything you originally wanted?
DH: It sounds clichéd, but my imagination was the limit here, not the Spectrum's RAM. When I started creating the building blocks for the pseudorandom imp names and graphics, I reached a point where I ran out of steam. You can only do so many variations on words like 'bubble', 'fuzzle' or 'fluffy' before you go crazy – not to forget some members of the World of Spectrum forum, who provided some great space invader names. My games so far are simple in both code and layout, so memory has never been a problem. If I start messing with screen buffers and elaborate maps I imagine it will be an issue.

One thing I did want to include was to give each screen a randomly generated name, like the Cave of Bulbarunia or something. I decided it would play better if the game area occupied the whole screen, though, so there was no room for it in the end. Ho hum.

RG: Were there any outstanding moments during development where things went particularly well or possibly badly?

» [Spectrum] Being followed.



DH: The development of the random generator for imps and space invaders went better than expected. I was concerned it would generate too many amorphous blobs, but thankfully most are pretty recognisable, with a bit of imagination.

RG: Was *Endless Forms Most Beautiful* easier to develop than *Stamp Quest* or did the extra complexity make it more challenging?
DH: Much easier. *Stamp Quest* was like pulling teeth because I was so new to coding; I remember excruciating afternoons spent debugging due to schoolboy errors. I still make these mistakes and have a lot to learn, but they happen less often and I can solve them faster. It was nice not having to worry about getting the best combination of blocks, platforms and sprites for each level – the pseudorandom generator took care of all that. Granted, it creates a pretty gaudy-looking screen occasionally, but the player moves on quickly enough and chances are the next one will be better.

One of the bigger challenges was to get decent pseudorandom numbers. Early in the development I was surprised to see how easy it was to get repeating patterns. In the end, I opted for a pretty simple system based on the movement of the player.

RG: And finally, where next for *Endless Forms Most Beautiful*'s hero, Moebius?
DH: I still like the cut of his jib, so it's likely that Moebius will continue to appear in my future projects, whatever they turn out to be. At some stage I'd like to write something with a bloody big map. I'm also very pleased to say Locomalito is writing a PC remake for RGCD, due for release later this year. From the demos I've seen so far I'd say it's going to be fantastic, considering the inferior hardware.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

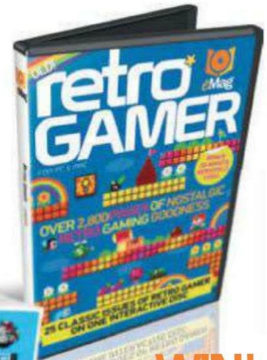
VAIN GAMER

Hi Retro Gamer,

Yes, well done for staying in business long enough to produce 100 issues. It's a very good mag. You deserve it. However, issue 100 was self-indulgent on a par with David Tennant leaving Doctor Who (no story, just the cast and crew saying goodbye to each other). The letters page, the forum page… all just the same thing over and over. (Congrats! 100! Hooray!) I mean, come on, we already had six pages of signatures and suchlike saying the same flipping thing. Overkill. Indulgent, and no mistake. It's a mag about games. Not a mag about a mag about games. It could have been great, issue 100. And to be honest, a heck of a lot of the *games* content was. Unfortunately, it was all just a bit too over the top, with a freebie designed for newbies, not the very people who kept you going for 100 issues in the first place.

Nick Lee, Exeter

Reaching issue 100 was a big achievement for us, Nick, and a lot of work went into making it feel unique and special. From the very beginning it was always planned to be a celebratory issue and it's difficult to do that without a little self-indulgence creeping in. As for including issue 1, we just felt it was fitting to show how far the magazine has evolved in 100 issues and pay tribute to the sterling efforts of Martin and the Live Publishing team who launched the magazine. We can see your point, but not everyone has had the opportunity to be with us from the beginning. Plus, as you say, there was still plenty of great retro gaming content in issue 100, if you weren't keen on the celebratory side of things.





WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

NECRONOM RAMPAGE

Hi Darran,

You mentioned sending in screenshots of high scores on *RG Rampage*, and as I enjoyed it quite a lot I thought I'd send you my best score. After a few goes under emulation I decided to transfer it to a 5.25" floppy disk and play it on my C64 on my big screen. It was great fun, and after quite a few goes I managed to finish it without losing a life (though I did waste some time on a couple of levels). Issue 100 was fantastic, and I also now have a full collection as I was missing issue 1, so thanks a lot for that.

Paul. (necronom on the forum)

Hi Paul,
Thanks for being one of the patient souls who took the time to type in *RG Rampage*. We hope you had as much fun tapping it into your computer as you did playing and finishing it. We were really pleased with the finished game, and we hope you'd all agree that Jason did a fantastic job.



» If, like Paul, you were one of our readers who took the time to type in *RG Rampage* then we tip our bowler hats to you.

PLAYER CAKE

Hello m'dears!

Celebrate good times, come on! So you reached 100 (a belated congrats on that score), the ZX Spectrum clocks the magic 30, and I hit my own personal milestone of 40 years. I spent countless happy hours with my Speccy in my earlier years, and have continued to do so in many incarnations since, so I'm delighted to have a joint celebration. Anyway, as well as being a great magazine, **Retro Gamer** is an amazing community of like-minded forumites, readers and writers with whom I'd love to share a slice of my birthday cake on the anniversary of the machine that inspired it. If you happen to get an "R Cake loading error" just rewind and start again.

Andy Jenkinson



» Andy left his poor old ZX Spectrum too close to the sun and paid the price.

Happy birthday, Andy! We're a little sad you didn't send us in a piece of cake, but you probably did Darran a favour; he's currently on a strict water and apple diet, and has a real cake weakness. And as you've no doubt seen this month, the ZX Spectrum's 30th anniversary hasn't gone unnoticed by us either. We celebrated the fact with comments and tributes from journalists, developers and designers.

YOUTUBE UPDATE



AFTER BEING LOCKED away in storage, Darran's old consoles have finally been set up, including his beloved Sega Saturn and Dreamcast. Expect videos featuring both systems in the coming months. Search **RetroGamerDaz** on youtube for more information.



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

CLASH OF THE TITANS

Retro Gamer,

I found your article comparing the C64 and ZX Spectrum particularly interesting as I live in the United States where the Spectrum wasn't a player. You've mentioned the "playground debate" previously and it was interesting to get the details on how the two are viewed in the UK. The interesting thing I've found over time – I started reading around issue 29 – with your C64 coverage is that it seems to be viewed more as a platformer-focused system, something that perhaps is true if you are limited to games on cassette. Is that the reason you never focus on other great C64 games (some of which were available for Spectrum as well) like *Wasteland*, *Strike Fleet*, *Archon*, *Bard's Tale*, and *Starflight*? These games had a depth not seen in games like *Maniac Mansion* or the like and I think they represent the true power of the C64 – the ability to provide a rich universe to discover and explore. Just a perspective – keep up the great work.

George

PS Incidentally, an article on *Wasteland* would be timely given the recent attempt to provide funding for a sequel.

Glad you enjoyed the feature, George. While we try to dedicate pages to the stories behind the biggest and most popular games and franchises, we do make an effort to highlight under-appreciated gems too. Last month we had a making-of for *Lucky & Wild*, and next month we have a making-of for the PlayStation game *Hogs Of War*. Of those 8-bit titles you mention, we'll certainly see what we can do.

MORE ISSUE 100 LOVE

To Retro Gamer,

Issue 100 was amazing, amazing because it went so naturally and effortlessly from issue 99 to the landmark 100. The developer autographs and top 100 gaming moments were great touches (the Paul Davies column was truly exceptional), but let me explain what I meant by my first statement. **Retro Gamer** has become so good at what it does that many of the articles that have been published in the last few years could have been included in issue 100 and no one would have blinked. The magazine is going where no other magazine has gone before. Well, let me rephrase that: magazines may have gone there 20 years ago, but without half of the writing style, intelligence, and humour that **Retro Gamer** brings. The heart, dedication, and massive amount of effort on the part of many different people shines through each issue. Number 100 and the issues that came before are something to celebrate. The issues to follow 100 will be something to celebrate, as well. I don't make it a habit to speak on behalf of others, but on behalf of the United States, the planet, and possibly the universe, thank you!

Will Oliver, Subscriber
Peoria, IL, USA

We're pleased issue 100 didn't disappoint, Will. We seem to be picking up new US readers each month, and long may it continue. We'd love you to spread the retro word for us across the pond, and in return we'll try to keep the magazine packed with unique and interesting content each month. Deal?

> "I found your article comparing the C64 and Spectrum particularly interesting as I live in the US, where the Spectrum wasn't a player"

RETROBATE PROFILE



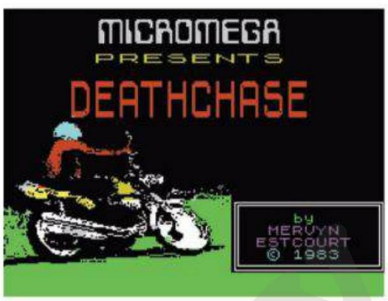
Name:	Martin Green
Joined:	20th Jan 2012
Location:	Hull, England
Occupation:	Bum
Website:	http://www.unikgamer.com/users/msg-2323.html
Fave Games System:	SNES



» [C64] Seriously, why even bother with chess when you can you play the considerably more superior *Archon*?

BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



DEATHCHASE

To coincide with the ZX Spectrum's 30th anniversary this month, we decided we would set high-scores on one of the Speccy's greatest racing games ever, the classic *Deathchase*.

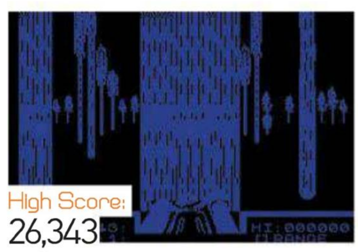


High Score:
21,641



DARRAN'S DEATHCHASE TIPS

Ignore the bikers because they'll just lead you into dense patches of trees. As if they don't even *want* you to rack up a good score. Try and take down helicopters and tanks when you can, as they're worth a decent amount of points.



High Score:
26,343



STUART'S DEATHCHASE TIPS

As there's no time limit for destroying the enemy bikers, you earn points for surviving as long as you possibly can. Always make the trees your number one priority, and then simply wait for targets to steer into your line of sight.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Who is your favourite Spectrum Developer?

merman Mel Croucher...Because he tried something different.

Scapegoat Obvious choice: Ultimate, they set the bar massively high early on, and consistently raised the bar with almost every release and precious few ever came close to catching up.

the_hawk I'd be lying if I said it wasn't Ultimate, however, for sheer consistency of quality Durell Software are hard to beat: *Harrier Attack, Scuba Dive, Saboteur I* & *2, Critical Mass, Thanatos* and of course *Turbo Esprit*. One of the few software houses you could trust to buy a game from without reading a review first!

jdanddiet For me, Incentive: consistent and groundbreaking.

ipmarks Predictably it is Ultimate. From *Jetpac* to *Knight Lore* they just made the Spectrum do seemingly impossible tasks, and in such a smooth and polished way. I can actually remember the sheer awe I felt on first loading up *Knight Lore*, and the sheer disbelief that my computer was playing a game that good. Yes they went wrong at the end, with too many isometric rehashes... but who cares when their early output was so fantastic?

DreamcastRIP Dominic Robinson and Stephen Crow (together & independently) for the likes of *Uridium, Zynaps, Flying Shark, Eliminator, Firelord* and *Starquake*.

webding Imagine/Denton Designs for me. Most people would say Ultimate, but games like *Target: Renegade, The Great Escape* and *Where Time Stood Still* were the only titles to make me ever (briefly) question my decision to stick with the Commodore when my sister's hand-me-down 64 bust and I needed to buy another micro.

Jagfest_UK Damn hard one that but I am going to go with Dave Perry who continually managed to push the basic 48k spectrum and proved you could do colour without the clash with games like *Savage, Dan Dare 3* and *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles*.

themightymartin Ocean/Imagine Software for me, purely for their excellent port of *Renegade* and its homegrown sequel.

pantal00ns Trust the Hawk to fly in and pick off Durell first. Although with a little more thought it would go to Gargoyle Games. Not a turkey among them, just a dog named *Scooby Doo*. *Tir Na Nog* just blew me away when I first got my hands on it.

joefish For me it would be Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith: a technical genius on the Spectrum and creator of my favourite game, *Hysteria*. Proud to have known him – all too briefly – and to carry on keeping the Speccy alive.

Matt_B I'll go for Pete Cooke. Obviously his 3D epics including *Tau Ceti, Academy* and *Micronaut One* are personal favourites, but he was incredibly prolific and dabbled in all manner of different genres including simulations, puzzles and text adventures.

scunny Without a doubt Julian Gollop, the man is a genius. *Rebelstar, Chaos, Lords of Chaos, Laser Squad* and later on the *X-COM* games, he gave me my love of turn based strategy that I still carry today. Thank you for all the lost months/years, Julian!

fgasking Joffa Smith for me - Although *Cobra* was brilliant (and far better than the crap C64 version), one of his best moments has to be with the conversion of *Midnight Resistance* from his Special FX days, which was one of the best arcade conversions on the Spectrum in my opinion.

Nemesis For his conversions of *Hyperports*, Mikie and Green Beret to original creations such as *Cobra*, it has to be Jonathan Smith. So talented at getting the best out of the rubber keyed wonder. That he managed parallax scrolling on a machine with no hardware assistance is testament to this.

BennyTheGreek Three way tie between Jonathan Smith, Steve Crow and Costa Panayi, *Hyper Sports, Starquake* and *Highway Encounter*. Three dollops of pure genius.

paranoid marvin Croucher's Automata – always creating something different; sometimes great other times just plain weird.

sirclive1 I have a real soft spot for Beyond Software, it started with the horrific *Space Station Zebra* and *Spellbound*, but after that it went on to produce a line of games anyone would be proud of - *Psytron, Lords of Midnight, Doomdarks Revenge, Spy vs Spy, Shadowfire*... awesome.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

GAMING PERFECTION

GarryG Mine would be *Pong, Space Invaders* and *Elite*. Without the last one games may never have taken on the shape they have today, and without the first two there may never have been a games industry at all, as we know it!

Lord Innit I suppose the Game Boy version of *Tetris* would just about be as close to perfection as you could get.

sscott *Ocarina of Time* got as close as I would ever imagine, if you were there 'at the time' and were into that type of game nothing touched it!

ToxieDogg *Super Mario Galaxy 2* is as close to perfection as I've played, and is only let down by some very slight camera issues and frustrating forced motion controls.

GOODBYE JOCKY

The Hardest of All Freds I met him some years back when he was doing an exhibition match. Proper nice chap and he gave me a 101 down match. He did it in 3 darts. RIP.

Helensification My brother had the honour of playing with Jocky at a charity event in the Seventies when my brother was only about 10 years old. He was such a character. RIP Jocky.

Greyfox R.I.P Jocky, you were one of the best. I think I'll load up a game of *Jocky Wilson's Darts Challenge*, made back in 1991, in memory of him.

resident paul I remember when Dexy's Midnight Runners played 'Jackie Wilson Said' on Top Of The Pops and the producers placed a huge picture of 'Jocky Wilson' behind them!

HALF LIFE 3: BORED WAITING

crusto When it does eventually surface I probably won't enjoy it. *HL2* and its episodes were superb. Brilliant games, and yet we have to wait for what seems like an age just for announcement of the next installment. Valve, will you please hurry the f*** up

slacey1070 I haven't thought about it too much. However, I loved both *HL* and *HL2*, so another instalment would be welcome. I suspect it would need a new graphics engine, as *HL2* does look quite dated now.

che_don_john Like most people I've kind of become desensitised to it all now. A few years back I was massively craving *HL3*, especially when rumours began to circulate that it would incorporate the Portal Gun, but now I hardly think about it.

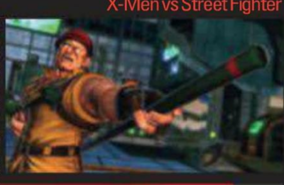
OLD vs NEW

We find out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, *Street Fighter X Tekken* against *X-Men vs Street Fighter*.

Street Fighter X Tekken



X-Men vs Street Fighter



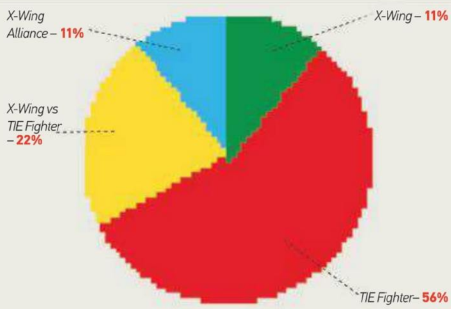
18% | 82%

retrogarden Played *Street Fighter X Tekken* for the first time last night, I definitely prefer it.

IronMaidenRule *X-Men vs Street Fighter* for me, Wolverine is way cooler than any *Tekken* character.

HOT TOPIC

Best X-Wing Game



"Another vote for *TIE Fighter*, *X-Wing* never grabbed me the way *TIE Fighter* did."
– theantmeister

"I wonder if any of the *Tie Fighter* voters actually played *Alliance*? It was like *TIE Fighter* but even better!"
– RetroBob

"*TIE Fighter* for me, although I was a little short to be a Stormtrooper."
– scunny

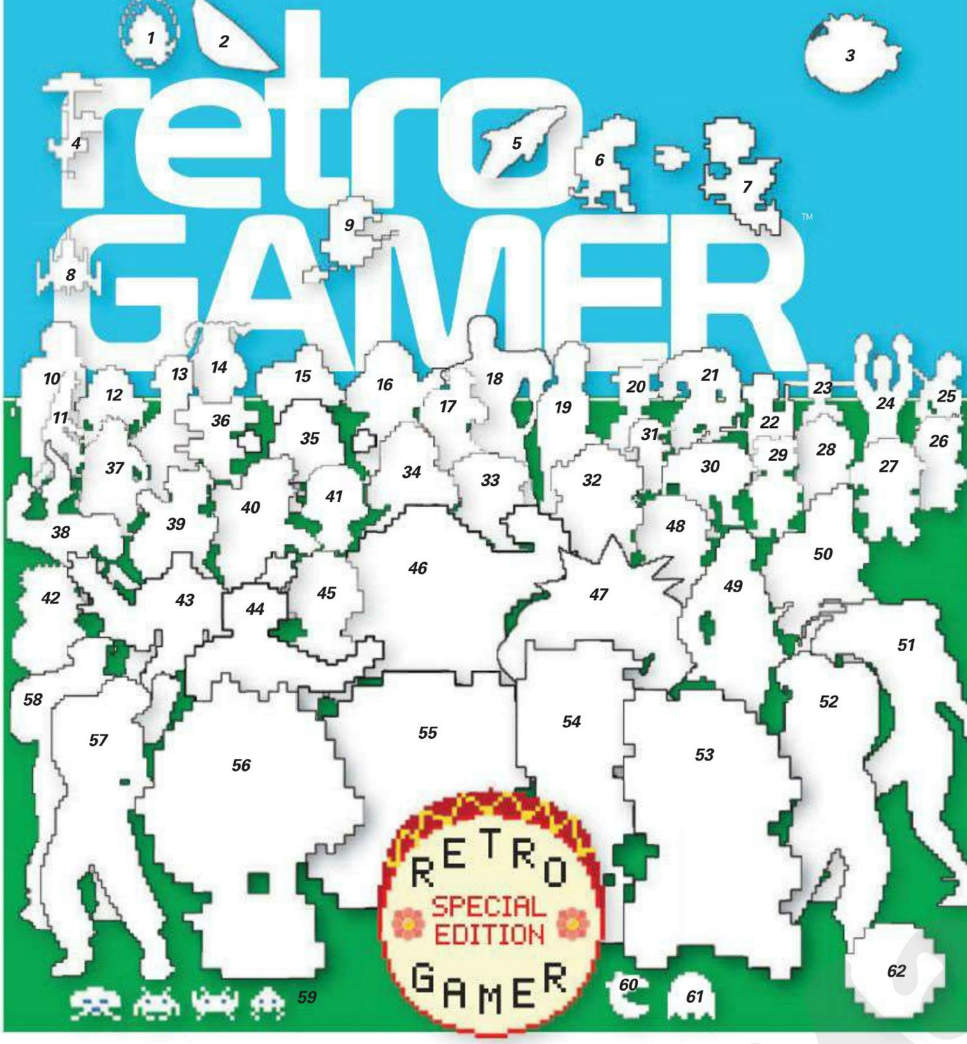
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Name The Sprites: The Answers

1 Bubblun **2** Cobra Mark III **3** Dr Robotnik **4** Floater Lemming **5** Ecco **6** Goblin **7** Pit **8** Gyaraga **9** Esmerelda Toadslime **10** Mr Wacker **11** Agent 4125 **12** Samus Arun **13** Wally Week **14** Mr Peepers **15** Solid Snake **16** Oolong **17** Ryu Hayabubsa **18** Sub Zero **19** Billy Lee **20** Miner Willy **21** Rash **22** Jetman **23** Hen-House Harry **24** Little Mac **25** Armakuni **26** Tom Tom **27** Jack **28** White Bomberman **29** Bentley Bear **30** Horace **31** Sabreman **32** Link **33** Bub **34** Mega Man **35** Dizzy **36** Rockford **37** Chuck D Rock **38** Earthworm Jim **39** Strider Hiryu **40** Marco Rossi **41** Bonk **42** Goemon **43** Bill Rizer **44** White **45** Luigi **46** Donkey Kong **47** Blanca **48** Alex Kidd **49** Tyris Flare **50** Sir Arthur **51** Blaze Fielding **52** Ryu **53** Mario **54** Sonic The Hedgehog **55** Kirby **56** Pac-Man **57** Ken Masters **58** Cody **59** Space Invaders **60** Ms Pac-Man **61** Clyde **62** Wizball

Amazingly, no one guessed ever single name, but reader Alex Vormbrock was the closest, with 59 correct answers. Well done Alex.



CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Unit 13

This PS Vita release looks like a bland third person shooter. Scratch beneath the surface, however, and you'll discover a good score-chaser. It's not as good as *The Club*, but it's a great addition to a Vita library.





STUART

Street Fighter X Tekken

I was a bit concerned about how well this crossover would work, but Capcom have delivered again. This is a solid brawler with gorgeous visuals, plenty of characters and loads to master.





ANDREW

Colin McRae: DiRT 2

The Codemasters series of rally games have all pretty much been great, and this one features the Colin McRae Challenge – completing it unlocks a video tribute to the man himself.

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Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.retrogamer.net

Magazine team

Editor **Darran Jones**
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
☎ 01202 586237
Editor in Chief **Rick Porter**
Art Editor **Will Shum**
Features Editor **Stuart Hunt**
Senior Sub Editor **Mat Hoddy**
Sub Editors **Olly Dean, Rebecca Richards**
Senior Art Editor **Greg Whitaker**
Head of Design **Ross Andrews**

Contributors
Richard Burton, Dave Cook, Charlotte Crookes, David Crookes, Paul Davies, Ashley Day, Paul Drury, Richard Hewison, Jason Kelk, Iain Lee, Nicola Linnington, Kate Logsdon, Graeme Mason, Anne-Claire Pickard, Samuel Roberts, Sorrel Tilley, Kim Wild, Stephen Williams

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Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Advertising Director James Willmott
☎ 01202 586432
james.willmott@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Head of Sales Hang Deretz
☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Senior Account Manager Matthew Knifton
☎ 01202 586434
matthew.knifton@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
Head of Subscriptions Lucy Nash
subscriptions@imagine-publishing.co.uk
For all subscription enquiries
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Circulation
Head of Circulation Darren Pearce
☎ 01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founders
Group Managing Director Damian Butt
Group Finance & Commercial Director Steven Boyd
Group Creative Director Mark Kendrick

Printing & Distribution
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nextmonth

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Double trouble

In a world exclusive, Yoshihisa Kishimoto reveals the creation of gaming's most influential beat-'em-up, Double Dragon



MORE EXCITING FEATURES TO LOOK FORWARD TO NEXT ISSUE



Andy O'Neil

■ The co-founder of Bluepoint Games discusses the difficulty of transporting Samus Aran to the third dimension and turning HD remasters into an art form.

30 years of Electronic Arts

■ To celebrate the company's 30th anniversary, EA luminaries old and new look back at three decades of revolutionising the videogame industry.



Inside the Atari 2600

■ Atari Inc turns 40 next month. To celebrate this momentous occasion, we speak to the creators behind the company's most iconic and successful console.



Flights of fancy

■ Flight simulators have been entertaining gamers for years. We trace the origins of the genre, from its beginnings on early 8-bit machines to releases on more recent hardware.

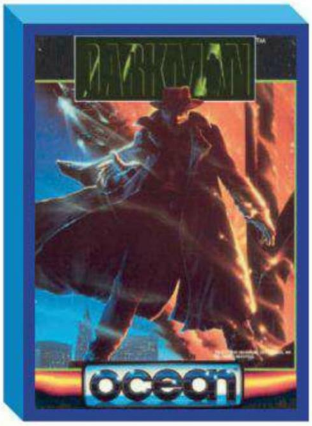

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ENDGAME



DARKMAN

» 1990 movie *Darkman* had all the ingredients for a half-decent videogame, but what gamers got was a forgettable licensed title. It was split into two styles of gameplay: the first was a bizarre surveillance-'em-up, in which you get to take photos of your targets to build a disguise. In the second, you got to wear the disguise briefly and bash everyone up. Sounds awesome, right?



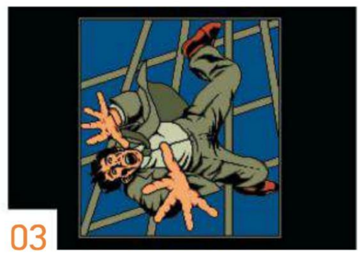
01

» Darkman traps the final guy responsible for his hideous facial disfigurement at the top of a construction site. To get close to his prey he's had to use his most complex disguise yet: a businessman with red hair.



02

» After removing his elaborate disguise, the perpetrator tries to peg it. Unfortunately, he's no match for Darkman, who grabs the man by the scruff of the neck and lifts him into the air. You can see where this is heading.



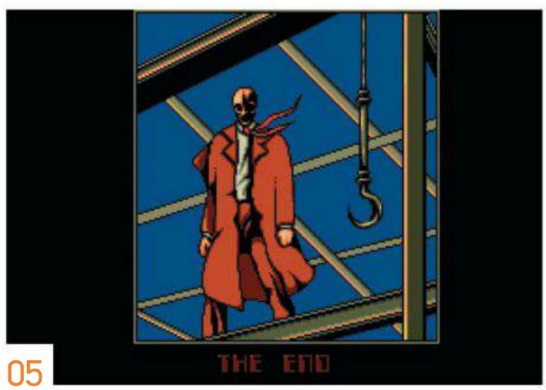
03

» Yep, he throws him off the edge. Surely this is as much as we'll be allowed to see. They'll cut away and show some end credits. We're not going to see the broken, bloody, potentially vomit-inducing remains of this guy, are we?



04

» It turns out we are. That's fairly unnecessary – particularly the spike that entered through his head and exited out his back. This villain certainly got his just desserts. That'll teach him for being stupid enough to upset Liam Neeson. He can fight wolves.



05

» The final image is pretty disturbing. Darkman appears to take delight in the fact he just caused someone a painful death. And what's the importance of the hook? We haven't the foggiest. It does add something to this final image though. Well, we think so.


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